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Thesis

THE USE OF THE SYMBOL IN ELINOR WYLIE

by

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OUTLINE OF THESIS

Author's Note

In order to avoid an unlimited number of footnotes, we should like to state that the quotations drawn from the prose and poetry of Elinor Wylie are to be found, on the pages indicated in the text of the thesis, in the collected volumes of Wylie which are listed in the bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

The writer is well aware of the many dangers that confront the one who would attempt an interpretation and evaluation of the work of so recent a creative writer as Elinor Wylie. Particularly is she aware that to attempt to controvert the established cant criticism of such a writer is itself an audacious step. But that is the intention of this paper. Wylie has been variously termed (and dismissed) as "the last of the Romantics," the "feminine T.S. Eliot," the cool, intellectual "perfect craftsman," and so on in phrases that have become, as does all such stock phraseology, meaningless. More than meaningless, any established system of descriptive phrases loosely bandied about does, in time, form a barrier to further interpretative reading of an artist's work.

In making a critical estimate of recent or contemporary literature, we are faced with difficulties that are the inevitable result of the very contemporaneity of the art. In traditional art, we are able to catch the long, slow emergence of artistic values and to relate them to their time, although we must then discover the relationship of these values with our own present. With contemporary art, however, there can be for the critic no reliance on the safe resort of the "test of time;" nor can he so detach himself from the present scene as to insure a clear view of the

of the period environment, or to establish the relationship of the work of art with the period that produced it. These difficulties inhere to some extent in any evaluation of Elinor Wylie's work. Accepting these limitations, we shall nevertheless endeavor to determine the importance of Wylie in relation to her time, and with respect to her artistic and philosophic perspective as they emerge in her writing.

In dealing with the life and writings of Wylie, we are hindered by the lack of biographical detail which would aid in a firmer understanding of the personal problems of her life and the consequent results in her writings. We are conscious, however, of the double paradox that Wylie presents. There is, first, the paradoxical relationship between the austerity of her artistic integrity and the confusion of her badly mazed private life. This latter--publicized and made to assume gargantuan proportions--has interfered with a correct evaluation of her writing. In contrast to it, we find evidence of a Puritan integrity in her artistic perspective in the wealth of historical detail she brings to her period novels. So very great was her understanding, not only of factual detail, but of the significance of that detail as it was woven into the warp and woof of English life, that Mr. Osbert Burdett[1] finds it hard to believe that her

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1. The Novels of Elinor Wylie, English Review, Oct., 1934

knowledge could have been gained by reading alone. This same integrity in accurate and detailed research leads to the second paradox--that between the polished and chiselled exterior of her art which contrasts so strongly with the experiential and modern material of her writing. Mary Colum recognized this when she wrote:--[1]

> "From the very beginning it used to be said of her that she was a traditional poet; in reality no woman writer ever <u>intellectually</u> made such a break with tradition and convention..... But Elinor Wylie broke down in her poetry not only certain conventions regarding what was to be expected from a poet and particularly a contemporary poet, but she broke down the ideas of what was to be expected from a woman poet, so subtly and strangely that hardly anyone noticed it..... everyone recognized a new voice but it was not at all easy to recognize the phases of this new mind, for they were clad in what looked very like old garments."

So it is that Wylie appears as an example of the intelligent woman and artist who had to force her way through a traditional background and social custom in order to achieve autonomy of mind, will, and emotion with man. The "surface calm and serene," her pretended indifference to the scandals of her career preserved at the cost of very great emotional strain, are paralleled in the perfect, almost enamelled surfaces that cloak the rebellious material of her art.

There are several main themes which dominate Wylie's work. Of first importance is her insistence on personal integrity of thought and action in the place of mere

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1. <u>In Memory of Elinor Wylie</u>, New Republic, Feb. 6, 1929

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ritualistic conformity. From this stems what is perhaps her greatest contribution to modern literature, for Wylie is in the vanguard of the distinguished women writers--such as Ellen Glasgow, and Virginia Woolf--who are concerned with the emergence of woman as an intellectual equal to man. Wylie was herself troubled by the need to harmonize her intellectual and emotional needs; it is this conflict within herself which provides the emotional undertone of all her writing. This, too, is the foundation for the brilliant satire of man's arrogance in a man-made world that we find in Jennifer Lorn. Finally, Wylie has a Puritan dislike for the artificialities of wealth and luxury as they interfere with a realization of the true and essential values in life.

In the formal elements of her art, Wylie is in the best of the modern tradition. Her use of symbolism, imagism, and cadence; the strict discipline of her use of allegory and fantasy by its relationship to an experiential core of meaning; the artistic sensibility and accuracy of her diction are evidence of a mature artist. That she used these elements within the matrix of the traditional poetic forms, or within the elegant Addisonian style of such a novel as Jennifer Lorn does not detract from her position as a modern writer using modern materials in a manner most frequently impeccable and authoritative. In an essay,[1] Wylie writes of her choice of traditional forms that it is "a deliberate

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1. Symbols in Literature, Collected Prose, P. 874

art, perhaps, but as such it is a discipline and a struggle not to be too impetuously scorned." Having once accepted the old forms, she made them her own; the outlines of her verse are skillfully filled, and there are few empty spaces and instances of padding as too often occur when a writer assumes the pre-established patterns.

It is just this use of the traditional forms that has hindered the correct evaluation of Elinor Wylie in relation to her period. Readers, seeing the traditional form, have too often presupposed traditional matter. Yet the remarkable results of Wylie's short literary career cannot be thoughtfully studied without the realization that here was an artist alive to the problems of the modern world. The flavor of her verse is not escapist; it is not the violet-scented dews of the lady 'Romantic'; not the futile, spiritless acceptance of defeat that echoes through T.S. Eliot's The Wasteland. I should like, then, to present Wylie as an artist using her medium towards a clarification of the problems of life, and facing those problems, through her art, with a sure intellectual and emotional integrity.

No such evaluation is possible without a study of the symbolical elements of her writing. I shall then want to study her allegorical, symbolical narrative, and the symbolism in her poetry. This is essential in relation to her work, for she made conscious use of allegory and symbolism as a valid, functional means of artistic expression. "'To

avoid the bitterness of being understood'--and to avoid the bitterness of understanding; sometimes it is that."[1] It was more than that, however, for in the same essay, Symbols in Literature, Wylie wrote:--

> "If you call a spade a diamond some people will think you are frivolous and affected, but other people will understand how much blacker things may be said about spades by the simple trick of pretending that they are diamonds."

Actually, then, Wylie uses fantasy and symbolism as a means of reaching toward a realization and clarification of the problems she was facing; by her choice of these elements, she signified her conviction of the power of symbolism to reveal the depth of her realization at the same time that she elevated her art from personal and subjective meaning to epic and universal significance.

1. Wylie, Elinor: Collected Prose, P. 879

Chapter I

MODERN SYMBOLISM IN ART

Since this study of Elinor Wylie is dependent upon the interpretation of her symbolism and allegory, it will be necessary to define what the writer understands by the term symbolism. We shall first want to differentiate between the symbolism of the French Symbolistes, and that symbolism which has run through the art history of all ages, and which is found in the writings of Elinor Wylie. A glance at the more extreme aims and methods of the French Symbolistes will, I think, be found useful in clarifying the aims and purposes of symbolism in general. We shall then establish the philosophic basis for symbolism, the psychological functioning of symbolism, its historic importance as a means of expression, and the justification for the use of the symbolic method in art.

Briefly, Les Symbolistes is the name given to a group of writers that worked in France from ca. 1885-1900. It will be seen that, just as the English Romantics had rebelled against the constraints of the Neo-Classicists in the early part of the nineteenth century, the French Symbolists revolted against the constraints of the naturalists and the Parnassians.

> "L'histoire observe que, vers 1885, l'école parnassienne et l'école naturaliste pâlissant, la pensée française se mourant, il se produisit une réaction idéaliste d'où le symbolisme

semble d'être sorti."[1]

The reaction against the objectivity of the naturalists, and the scientific, hard clarity of the Parnassians whose poetry "éblouit l'oeil, frappe l'oreille: le parnassien n'émeut pas,"[2] went far beyond the revolt of the earlier English Romantics. Where the Romantics had felt the corresponding states between man and nature and had used nature as a reflection of similar and corresponding states (as in Wordsworth) or had, like Byron, used nature as a screen against which to dramatize man's gestures and moods, the Symbolists proclaimed the essential unity of man with nature. For the basis for the Symbolists' poetry is the fusion between le moi and les choses. When Baudelaire writes, "Je suis un cimetière" it is as if he were saying, "The desolation of the cemetery and of myself are so similar that I no longer know where the I begins and the cemetery ends." Bonneau concludes that "Le symbole est un rapport, et tout rapport suppose au moins deux termes clairement conçues."--and again, "le symbole est l'affirmation d'une analogie essentielle entre un moment de la durée du moi et un moment de la durée des choses."[3]

It should be clear that such a poetry reflects the philosophic revolution that had discarded the traditional ideas of the duality of mind and body, of man and nature, and

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1. Bonneau, George: Le Symbolisme dans la Poésie française contemporaine, P. 10
2. Bonneau, George: Ibid., P. 12
3. Ibid., Page 84

that had accepted the Kantian and Hegelian transcendental, idealist philosophy. But such a symbolist as Mallarmée (and his followers) did not follow the logical implications of his philosophic system. He believed with Hegel that without perception the world does not exist--he must therefore have agreed that without perception the symbol does not exist and also, that the aesthetic emotion arises from the light of the expression--all of which should have required of him symbols of clarity. This Mallarmée, and to greater or lesser degree, the Symbolists as a group, did not always achieve. Their failure in achieving symbols of clarity leads Bonneau to make the criticism:--[1]

> "Dans le mots de Fernand Gregh, 'Nous ne proscrivons pas le symbole: mais qu'il soit clair. Un beau symbole obscur, c'est un beau coffret dont on n'a pas la clef.'"

The reason for the obscurity of the French Symbolists lies in the fact that they represent a turn away from the main stream of art. Like that of the English Pre-Raphaelites and later Decadents, theirs is a poetry that cuts itself off from close relationship with life. The French Symbolist "detached himself from society" and was indifferent to it. The Romantics had revolted against the traditions and forms of a society which were repulsive to them; the Symbolist cultivates his unique personal sensitivities without exerting his will against society. The Symbolist, rather than strug-

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1. Bonneau, George: Op. Cit., Page 72

gle with life, withdraws from it to seek a life of solitary brooding--indeed, the long train of Symbolists, Mallarmée, Verlaine, Corbière, Laforgue, Samain, and Verhaeren, were in varying degrees, socially maladjusted persons.[1.]

Mallarmée had written that the object of the poet was not to name something, but to evoke or suggest it, and goes on to warn against the attempt to examine logically the symbol. Now the assumption of the Symbolists was that each feeling, each sensation, or experience of the individual varies from every other. To express the vague, haunting, indefinite individuality of each experience as it occurs within the unique personality of the poet, a new language was necessary.[2.] The invention of the special language that would express his unique personality was the particular task of each poet. Direct statement and description would not convey these vague and fleeting impressions; for that a new language of symbols, set in a matrix of subtle music and rhythm so that its succession of images and words would be enhanced by the harmonic and rhythmic setting, must be evolved. As Wilson defines it, "Symbolism (of the French Symbolists) may be defined as an attempt by carefully studied means--a complicated association of metaphors--to communicate personal feelings."[3.] The close relationship of this

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1. Wilson, Edmund: Axel's Castle, Page 269
2. Wilson, Edmund: Op. Cit., Pages 20-21
3. Wilson, Edmund: Op. Cit., Pages 20-21

type of writing with the painting of such Impressionists as Dégas, Monet, and Renoir, should be briefly noted. The Impressionists' concern for the truthful representation of a scene or an object as it appeared at one given moment, without regard for the thing as it actually was in its permanent form and colour, reflects an interest, analogous to that of the Symbolists in transient emotional impressions, in the transitory rather than the factual aspect of things.

The Symbolist's preoccupation with the expression of his inward feelings, experienced as they were within his own private world, led him to the creation of arbitrary and private symbols. It also led him to ignore, often, the need of intelligibility, with the result that his poetry is often evocative and suggestive in its lyric musicality, but the clear perception of its meaning is unrealizable. For the more extreme Symbolist there need be no explicit, logical meaning; there need be only the bond of a similar affective quality arising from each distinct symbol--a bond which is too often apparent only to the poet himself. His language becomes, finally, purely musical sound which by its subtle nuances of tone and rhythm acts as an evocator of moods. It is of such a symbolism that Baes writes:--[1]

> "L'obscurité est immanquable quand cet artiste, unsoucieux des sensations de son public, se contente d'exprimer ce que lui fait éprouver la nature, en un moment d'exaltation psychique ou bien quand il veut rendre par les signes

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1. Baes, Edgar: Le Symbole et L'Allégorie, Page 77

qui lui sont personelles, une pensée ou une abstraction."

The American symbolist has not so turned away from society. For him, while the principles of symbolism are primarily the same, the communication of the symbolic meanings is important. He employs his technique to reveal the reality and truth of the world which is apprehended by the consciousness, but is unperceived by the senses.[1.]

Symbolism is, in effect, a necessary condition of man for purposes of communication. "Man must, it seems, find a symbol in order to express himself."[2.] Our language is itself a world of symbols--a word is a symbol, its meaning constituted by the ideas, images, emotions, and tendencies toward action it arouses in the mind of the hearer. Such a word as <u>chair</u> has, for example, no definite referent; it has a very complex, experiential referent which each individual builds up out of his own experiences with various types of chairs and their functional relationship with him, and from which he abstracts a composite image of <u>chair</u>.[3.] There is, of course, no necessary connection between the symbol, in this case <u>chair</u>, and those elements in our experience which it symbolizes. The belief that there is a necessary relationship between the thing and its name has been the object of

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1. Symons, Arthur: The Symbolist Movement in Literature, P.2
2. Whitehead, A.N.: Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect, P.62
3. Whitehead, A.N. : Op. Cit., Page 2

study by the semasiologists in recent years. It is the object of the science of semantics to distinguish between words as signs of things in our experience, that is, "An account of interpretation in causal terms" by which language is treated as a system of signs, and "a division of the functions of language into two groups, the symbolic and the emotive."[1] The reader will readily grant the importance of such a study when he reflects upon the very general confusion and misunderstanding which arises in any argument on such a subject as Liberalism. The difficulty springs from the fact that there is no definite referent for Liberalism; it is merely an abstraction and takes on its 'meaning' in view of past patterns of experience with that word in various contexts and applications. Since the experience of any two people may differ, and differ widely, it is not at all surprising that such a word may have various 'meanings.' When we fail to recognize this elementary fact concerning words and their function, we tend "to have signal reactions to certain words and read into people's remarks meanings that were never intended."[2] Emerson recognized this richness of words when he wrote of words as symbols; "Every word was once a poem. Every new relation is a new word."[3]

More fundamental still is the symbolic functioning of

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1. Ogden & Richards: The Meaning of Meaning, Page xxvi
2. Hayakawa, S. I.: Language in Action, Page 52
3. Emerson, R. W.: Essays, Second Series, The Poet, Page 18

the mind upon which all our knowledge depends.[1]

> "The human mind is functioning symbolically when some components of its experience elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions, and usages, respecting other components of its experience. The former set of components are the 'symbols', and the latter set constitute the 'meaning' of the symbols. The organic functioning whereby there is a transition from the symbol to the meaning will be called 'symbolic reference'."

To return to the chair as symbol: we look up and see a coloured shape and say, That is a chair. What we have seen, however, is a coloured shape and we have passed from a direct perception of the shape to the conscious recognition of the chair in some mode of use, thought, or emotion, through a train of logical thought. The coloured shape has become a symbol for another element in our experience. The direct recognition, or our sensory awareness of the coloured shape, is infallible--we must accept our direct experience as true in order to function effectively; it is in the transition from the sensory perception to the meaning that error is likely to arise.

Symbolism in literature is an extension of the symbolic functioning of the mind as it is seen in our acquiring of all conscious knowledge.[2]

> "The poet is the person for whom visual sights and sounds and emotional experiences refer symbolically to words. The poet's readers are people for whom his words refer symbolically to the sights and sounds and emotions he wants to evoke."

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1. Whitehead, A. N.: Op. Cit., Page 8
2. Whitehead, A. N.: Op. Cit., Page12

We may further state that the literary symbol is clear--it is in the transfer (symbolic reference) from the symbol to the meaning of the symbol that error is likely to arise. Each reader or each percipient will have his own store of knowledge and experience differing from that of every other reader. For each reader will arise different overtones of meaning--of consciousness, emotions, beliefs, and usages--in relation to his stored fund of knowledge. To overcome this difficulty, to minimize the possibility of error in the symbolic reference, the poet must select many images that will be pregnant with the overtones he wishes to evoke. This is a counterpart of the necessary manipulations of single words. The reader is aware of the many facets of meaning a single word such as <u>father</u> has--its religious, family, patriotic associations--which are in turn coloured by the percipient's psychological set toward that particular word in any of its facets of meaning. We cannot say, then, that the word <u>father</u> has <u>a meaning</u>; it has meaning only in relation to its use, its context, and to the percipient's attitude at the moment of perception. Just as the single word must be experienced in a context that will lead us to perceive the meaning in that set of relationships, so the created symbol of the artist must be oriented in a matrix of tonal and rhythmic significance, and in alliance with associated images that will enable the reader to perceive the particular facet of the symbol which is relevant to its meaning in that

particular usage.

That symbolism in art is no new problem is evidenced by the discussion of symbolism in such ancient writers as St. Augustine and the Psuedo-Dionysius. Inquiring into the greater emotional intensity derived from symbolic rather than plain statement, their arguments conclude that is is because we "have to move mentally from riddle to answer, from picture presented to the imagination to spiritual truth, and the mental excursion, as such, is pleasing to us." And again, "As a torch burns more brightly when in motion, so our emotions flame joyously when thought is active."[1.]

The word <u>symbol</u> came into the service of Christian and aesthetic theory from an earlier literal employment meaning a mark, or sign of recognition. Thus the Apostles' Creed became the mark of the Christian faith; the external sign for an "invisible tendency of the soul." In Medieval symbolism, it came to mean a covering, a veil for religious truth. But in Renaissance times, the symbol took on a wider and ever more independent aesthetic significance; it was no longer merely "the outside of Christian wisdom."[2.] Modern symbolism in its turn, tends to awaken an awareness of the 'Infinite' or of the deep spiritual significance of experience which transcends the limited realistic experience of the human mind.

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1. Gilbert and Kuhn: <u>The History of Aesthetics</u>, Page 154
2. Gilbert and Kuhn: Op. Cit., Pages 154-155

Confronted by the obvious difficulty of remote symbols to the literal mind, we may state that it is the idea or the emotion which the symbol evokes in relation to the other idea that forms the symbolic reference, and not any external similarity of form.

> "Le symbole est toujours un signe condensé relatif à l'essence spirituelle d'un être ou d'un fait à une idée abstraite." (1.)
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> .....
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> "Il est le signe d'une chose fictive, de l'idée pure, qui synthétise d'autres idées vagues. C'est....un indice d'un objet (qui) est prement celui d'existence de la nature de cet objet." (2.)

Thus we note the courage of the lion and in the symbolic process, lion becomes the mark of courage. The traditional Chinese symbol of the <u>dragon</u> to represent <u>free spiritual life</u>, and its later emergence in Hermetic Art to represent <u>Deified Man</u>, arises from the conception of the dragon as a super-brute, and a creature of "splendour and terror" in the world of beasts: as the dragon is supreme in the animal world, it may symbolize the man who has "transcended his lower nature, (and) has received wings wherewith to live on higher levels of reality."[3.]

In the use of a symbol there is the attempt, then, to signify an idea, an emotion, a belief, through a sign. We have noted that there is a disproportion between the symbol and its meaning. "Matter serves rather as an environment of

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1. Baes, Edgar: <u>Le Symbole et L'Allégorie</u>, Page 53
2. Baes, Edgar: Op. Cit., Page 100
3. Underhill, Evelyn: <u>Mysticism</u>, Page 176

the spirit than as its plastic incarnation."[1] There is, indeed, between the symbol and its realized meaning, the same gulf that we recognize between the immediate recognition of sense-perceptions and the deep significance of the perception that is revealed as the result of our realization of the conformity of the present experience to our past experience.

The artist turns from direct logical statement to symbolism because of his awareness of the inability of such language to express the deeper meanings of his total realization. For the effect of symbolism is to enhance the importance of what is being symbolized--and the direct participation that the symbol demands on the part of the reader serves to heighten the emotional intensity of the achieved recognition of what the poet is saying. More basically, however, the artist recognizes in symbolism a native and direct mode of expression, in which the symbol is the image of what something means.

The validity of the symbolic method as a direct means of expression may be seen in the recurrence of particular symbols in the literature of varying civilizations and epochs. The mystic psychologist, Jung, sees in the emergence of the same symbols throughout many ages an evidence of a "collective unconscious" which underlies the "personal unconscious"

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1. Gilbert and Kuhn: The History of Aesthetics, Page 443

of the individual. "The contents of the personal unconscious constitute the personal and private side of psychic life. They are chiefly the so-called feeling-toned complexes." The myths of primitive man, Jung interprets as "symbolic expressions for the inner and unconscious psychic drama" which he (the primitive man) sees mirrored in "the events of nature." The "collective unconscious" is not individual, but universal; "it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals." Now Jung has derived his theory of a psychic reservoir (race-dream) from the reappearance in the art products of his patients of the same epic symbols: such as the serpent, lake, mountain, and circle.[1] This would not seem to be a sound conclusion; it is more likely that these symbols are themselves permanent in our experience and that their re-appearance in art is evidence that people think and react similarly in the presence of the objective realities of experience. It is, in part, upon this basic similarity of response that symbolism depends for its validity as a means of expression.

Further evidence of the validity of symbolism as a native mode of expression is seen in the experimental study of dream psychology. Dream-symbolism is the outgrowth of content which is elaborated outside of man's conscious mind. It is the result of underlying motives which are related to the instinctive drives and impulses of the personality. We

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1. Jung, Carl G.: The Integration of the Personality, P.52 et seq.

do not wish to become too involved in a discussion of the workings of the conscious versus the subconscious mind, but it is becoming increasingly clear that in dreams the natural intellect is trying to find the actual meaning behind the words we use but which are only approximate realizations of meaning. The modern temper of anti-intellectualism is too well known to need any further elaboration here; it is the result of a profound suspicion that man's mental processes are not so much logical as rationalistic and self-protective devices against the instinctive urge for greater experiential reality. The close kinship between these two levels of man's mind may be seen in the fact that the symbolism in the dream is usually negative, or at the best, so cryptic and distorted that the underlying meaning can be deciphered only after far-reaching analysis; the distortion is the result of the attempt at psychical disguise which allows the conscious mind gratification of the censured desires by masking them.[1] There are other more obvious discrepancies between dream and poetic symbolism. The phantasy is characterized by the lack of the awareness of time and space; there is, in the dream, no sense of word-value as such, nor of the sound or rhythm which enhance the poetic symbol. Thus, though the process of poetic and dream symbolism is similar, the purpose of the poet, to discover the positive meaning of deep-seated experiences, elevates the poet's symbolism from the casual relaxation of dream-symbolism.

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1. Downey, June: Creative Imagination, Page 135

In the poet's attempt through symbolism to effect a clarification of the individual's experience--sensory, intellectual, and psychic--within a harmonic symbolic figure, lies the difference between symbolism and religious mysticism in general. The mystic is concerned with establishing a relationship with the Absolute; he leaves the terrestrial world, his consciousness is transfigured in a particular way, and "he lives at different levels of experience" which the normal consciousness cannot deal with. The mystic transcends the life of the senses, and gives himself in full surrender to "the embrace of Reality."[1] In the mystic's symbolism we may see a further difference from that of the poet. The mystic "nails a symbol to one sense" whereas for the poet all symbols are "fluxional" and are capable of new meaning and application.[2]

> "Mysticism consists in the mistake of an accidental and individual symbol for an universal one. The morning-redness happens to be the favorite meteor to the eyes of Jacob Behman, and comes to stand for the same realities to every reader."

The poet, as we shall see, does not so fixate a symbol; the symbol comes to him out of his experience and is invested with the meaning of the one particular experience; it may then assume a new and varying significance in the light of a later experience. The poet's symbol may then be termed <u>organic</u>, rather than <u>static</u>, as is the symbol of the mystic.

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1. Underhill, Evelyn: <u>Mysticism</u>, Page 88 et Seq.
2. Emerson, R. W.: <u>Essays</u>, 2nd Series; <u>The Poet</u>, P. 34

The choice of symbolism as a means of artistic expression, signifies, as we have said, the writer's realization of the inability of the prosaic statement to convey the full significance of the poet's experience. It signifies the attempt to get behind the mask of words and the surface verbalism of the merely rational statement to unfold the experience of the total personality--and to call into participation the reader's complete range of perception.

How, then, is the symbol a more direct and native mode of expression? We may, I think, answer this out of our own experience, for it is doubtless true that the perceptive person has evolved symbols from his individual experience. To illustrate we may take the case of Mary, a bridal attendant, who was overcome with emotion and forced to withdraw from the ceremony. The explanation was not far to seek. The altar had been adorned with calla lilies--the same flowers which had been placed on her mother's cask. The nervous prostration and grief she had experienced on that earlier occasion was re-experienced at the sight of the lilies: in other words, the lilies had become the symbol of a total experience, and had become the focus within itself of all the emotional and mental excitations of the first experience. Similar fixations of affective complexes on particular elements of experience take place frequently in our own lives.

The way in which such transfers of affective charges take place is the study of psychologists. Their study is

not yet complete, but there is mounting evidence of an underlying logic of the emotions which moulds more frequently than we care to admit our conscious mental processes. June Downey, in treating of the way "symbols come into being" writes:--[1]

> "there is a relative detachment of feelings from their natural objects since there is a disposition to shut out of consciousness the objects which aroused them, and they become 'free floating affects' ready to attach themselves to stray percepts or ideas. The motif of many a lyric would, indeed, seem to be a disembodied emotion that, lingering on the outskirts of consciousness suddenly materializes itself in a flower seen by chance,....which then serves as a medium for communication, a symbol of subtle meaning."

Now this would seem to be a reversal of the processes of affective spread from one element in experience to another. The theory of 'disembodied emotions' and 'free floating affects' focussing--without any apparent reason--on an objective element in experience, would seem to need some qualification. There must be some point of similarity, whether of external shape, colour, sound, or of emotional toning, or ideational content, between the elements of the experience to be symbolized, and the symbol in which the experience becomes objectified. The bond between the symbol and what it symbolizes must be discoverable to analysis; more than that, to be effective, the bond must be discoverable to the poet's readers as well as to the poet, else symbolism becomes in reality a

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1. Downey, June: Creative Imagination, Page 130

'mystic' experience and meaningless save to the original experiensor.

To illustrate we may quote in part that poem by Ridgely Torrence, The Son. The first twelve lines finds the poet meeting "an old farm-wife, selling some barley." In brief, stark lines they discuss crops, the price per bushel of barley, Charley's work, his girl, and then:--

> "It feels like frost was near--
> His hair was curly.
> The spring was late that year,
> But the harvest early."

The reader knows that Charley is dead--but the poet expresses through the natural symbol harvest more significance than is to be found in one individual's death. Charley's death becomes one with the reaping of the crops; it takes its place in the epic cycle of life and death in all nature. We note, however, that the symbol harvest contains within itself the reference to death; that is the link by which Charley's death is transmuted from an isolated experience to share in the natural experience of all living things.

The lyric poet, H. D., in her poem Pygmalion, finds her symbolic material ready at hand. Through the re-working of the ancient Greek myth, she reveals her fearful wonder at the processes of her creative imagination.

> "have I made this fire from myself?
> or is this arrogance?
> is this fire a God
> that seeks me in the dark?"

Thus is her own amazement and wonder at the creative process

expressed through the symbolic use of the legend of the statue become woman. And thus does she relate her own experience of creation to the experience of all creative artists whose delight in their powers is mingled with wonder as to its source. This fire of the creative imagination--is it of and in me? or is it an external force that works through me? That is her question, and in this symbolic representation, it achieves a great emotional intensity. And, we note again, there is a clear reference between symbol and the experience which is symbolized.

Emerson finds in the oneness of all nature the raison d'être of symbolism. He writes, "The Universe is the externization of the soul"--the poet is the one who realizes "that there is no fact in nature which does not carry the whole sense of nature,...." For him "Small and mean things serve as well as great symbols." It is the poet's "ulterior intellectual perception" which enables him to put "eyes, and a tongue into every dumb and inanimate object."[1] The poet is the one who has learned the "feat of the imagination....in showing the controvertibility of every thing into every other thing."[2] And the poet, working with the consciousness of the wholeness of the universe, finds in the symbol the means by which the emotional and intellectual experiences of his creative spirit become fused into one meaningful image.

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1. Emerson, R.W.: Essays, 2nd Series; The Poet, P. 14 et Seq.
2. Emerson, R.W.: Vol. VI; Conduct of Life; Essay on Beauty

We have referred several times to the symbol as a functional method in art--perhaps there is needed a clarification of what we mean by the term. The poet's symbol, we have seen, is organic; that is, it grows and takes its shape and significance through the poet's experience. It is not a fanciful recognition of surface similarity, the result of the chance likenesses of external form. That is the process of imagery, and is on a different level of experience. The symbol, its imaginal form, is not merely <u>like</u> its referent in some measure of similarity, it <u>is</u>, rather, the referent with all its emotional, spiritual, and intellectual meaning in another form. The artistic integration of a symbol is the result of the poet's reaching through his intellectual perception to the underlying core of subconscious experiential meaning. Thus in Wylie's poem, <u>This Hand</u>, the hand which "preserves a shape Too utterly its own" becomes the symbol of Wylie's failure as a woman. Her experience is incomplete; the stifling of her emotions has prevented her from the rich commingling of her body and spirit with another's; her life, too, "preserves a shape Too utterly its own." This, we note, is the artistic confession of that which her intelligence had set up its barriers against--the need for emotional release. That which her mind refused to credit, her subconscious intellect realized; it is this emotive force that lies behind her symbol which gives it validity, and which makes it an integrated and functional means of expression.

The symbolic poet finds a vast world of already created literary, religious, and mythological symbols ready for his use. In H. D.'s Pygmalion, we saw the use of a mythological symbol for the expression of her own experience; in Torrence's The Son, we saw the use of the natural, or epic, symbol, harvest, to express the poet's attitude toward human death. We find such symbols as the lion, rose, garden, or Lilliputian, which have become established in our literature, and whose use provides within themselves a clue to the meaning the poet desires to evoke. It might be well to state that much of the perplexity of the modern reader who is confronted with symbolic art, is due to the lack of knowledge of the classical and mythological background of our literature. There is, further, a continual growth in new and original symbolism that has been and is being created by recent or contemporary artists. Whether the artist chooses to express himself through traditional symbols, or to create new symbols, he must so place them in a context that the reader is able to deduce the desired meaning of the symbol.

We shall not need to discuss further the types of symbols; that will appear in the discussion of the symbolism we find in Wylie's prose and poetry. We find therein examples of all kinds, Classical, Mythological, Religious, and newly created symbols. Her use of the traditional symbols--particularly the Animal symbol--we shall show to be organic and functional, for in her hands, they become instruments that

reveal the significance of her realized experience. Her allegory, composed as it is of many symbolic elements, is an extension of the symbolic methods of her poetry over a wider range. In her novels, too, the symbolism tends to be more directly created, and to be a composite or accumulative symbolism.

In Elinor Wylie's choice of symbolism as a means of expression, we may note the significant element. The symbol is the focal point for the emotional and intellective qualities of the poet's experience. The symbol--the fusion in one image of mind and emotion--becomes the way in which Wylie fused these two elements of her personality. In her art, then, the emotional element in Wylie finds its rightful place as an element of experience without which life is partitive and incomplete. That is why we may--must--turn to a study of her symbolism to find the sort of person Wylie was; that is why any other approach to Wylie's art or personality is misleading; for Wylie, until her last volume of poetry, never gave overt expression to the basic emotional experiences which moulded her development. It is not at all strange that Wylie should so mask her inner meaning--the delicacy of her art gives evidence of extreme sensitivity; what could so deeply wound her as a person could not freely be written for the world to perceive. And so Wylie fashioned a brilliant art, a witty and exquisite art, a symbolic art that would, as she wrote, prevent "the

bitterness of being understood" and likewise, "the bitterness of understanding."

Chapter III

ELINOR WYLIE: WOMAN AND POET

We have elsewhere referred to the lack of biographical detail concerning Elinor Wylie's life. There is, it would seem, the same cloak flung over her personal career that she chose to fling over her writing. There is enough information, however, so that from it, together with the self-revelation we find in her prose and poetry, we may deduce a fairly complete understanding of Wylie as a person. We shall first briefly outline the factual detail, and shall then treat the various aspects of her personality as they relate to her art.

Elinor Wylie was born on September 7, 1885, in Somerville, New Jersey. Her family was a very distinguished one. Her father, Henry Martin Hoyt, was at one time Solicitor-General of the United States under President Theodore Roosevelt; her grandfather had been governor of Pennsylvania; her mother, Anne McMichael, was the granddaughter of a former mayor of Philadelphia. Elinor's childhood was spent in a suburb of Philadelphia, with frequent summers in Maine. She attended Miss Baldwin's School, Bryn Mawr, for a short time, and, later, the Holton Arms School at Washington, D. C. At the age of eighteen, Elinor was studying art at the Corcoran Museum of Art in Washington.

After a début in Washington, and following an unhappy romance, Elinor married Philip Hichborn, son of Admiral

Hichborn, in 1905. The early marriage was unfortunate, and after five unhappy years, Elinor eloped with Horace Wylie--a cultured and intelligent man fifteen years her senior. The inability of either one to get a divorce forced them to go to England where they lived quietly as Mr. and Mrs. Waring. Within two years of the elopement (and shortly after the publication of his book, Hoof Beats) Philip Hichborn committed suicide. The outbreak of the war brought the Wylies back to America; they settled in Boston in 1915. Horace finally obtained his divorce, and, in 1916, he and Elinor were married.

The next two years found them dividing their time between summers at Mount Desert, Maine, and winters in Boston and Augusta, Georgia. Horace then accepted a government post at Washington; but the Wylies returned to find that society still refused to accept them. In 1919-20, Elinor renewed an earlier slight acquaintance with William Rose Benét; met Sinclair Lewis; and through them, decided to go to New York--"a world which would not hold her past against her."[1]

The separation from Horace resulted in a divorce in 1923. Later in that year, Elinor married William Rose Benét. The next years were spent for the most part in and near New York City, with three summers in England. Returning from England in the fall of 1928, Elinor resumed, against the warning advice of her physician, the strenuous writing career which had resulted in the publication of seven books

1. Van Doren, Carl: Three Worlds, Page 221

of prose and poetry in seven years. Her health had, for several years, been very poor, and finally, on December 16, 1928, Mrs. Wylie died after a severe paralytic stroke. Her last book, completed the day before her death, Angels and Earthly Creatures, was published posthumously.

The attempt to build up a complete personality upon the basis of a few reticent accounts, cannot, in the case of Wylie, be satisfactory. The biographical writings must be supplemented by interpretations of those writings which seem most directly autobiographical. This last is always a hazardous step, for the relationship between an artist's personal and artistic careers connot be completely and definitely established. There are some few poems, however, in which Wylie reveals herself as she thinks herself to be. These poems, and certain others in which the autobiographical element is clear will be used in the analysis of the important phases of Wylie's personality.

Of primary importance is the family background with its tradition of culture and luxury. Wylie never completely outgrew the vestiges of the most traditional and closely bound society in the world, that of Philadelphia. At the opposite extreme, however, was the Puritan inheritance that stemmed from the early Massachusetts Hoyts, and which forms one of the bases for the tragic self-discipline that we see emerging in her art. It stands revealed in the sonnet:--

"Down to the Puritan marrow of my bones
There's something in this richness that I hate.
I love the look, austere, immaculate
Of landscapes drawn in pearly monotones.----"

with its outcry against the too rich, wild luxuriance of the south and its alliance with the simpler, harder outlines of the north.

Her education followed the pattern of the conventional preparation for entrance into a brilliant social life. This lack of a formal education was a source of distress to her. To compensate for this lack, Wylie had the advantage of study with her grandfather and her father to whom she gave credit for most of her education. "She had grown up among minds and manners."[1] --and fortunately the influence of the minds was the stronger. Accurate and detailed research became a passion with her; its results can be seen in the sparkling erudition of her novels. Of her, Carl Van Doren could write:[2]

> "My Elinor Wylie had as sure and strong an intelligence as I have ever known. It was impossible to bring up an idea that she had not had or did not instantly understand. It was impossible to bring out a fact that did not fit into something she already knew. No formal scholar, she had a scholar's instinct for exactness."

The same fundamental struggle between mind and manner led her eventually, in a futile rebellion, to plunge into an early marriage with Philip Hichborn. Little is known of

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1. Van Doren, Carl: Three Worlds, P. 218
2. Van Doren, Carl: Op. Cit., P. 233

of their relationship, but of it Wylie says, "I didn't know what love and marriage meant.... Marriage was a prison... There was no room for my mind at all. ... I ran away with Horace. ...he was...father as well as husband to me."[1] There is also little known of Wylie's reaction to Hichborn's subsequent suicide excepting her statement that had Philip "killed himself over me, he could not have waited two years to do it."[2]

She had, at any rate, made her final choice between a conventional society life and a literary career. This decision is seen in the symbolic poem Full Moon, in which the bands of silk and miniver, the ermine, and the black gauze, symbolize the trappings of the idle, meaningless formula of her life; in which the phrase Harlequin in lozenges Of love and hate, brilliantly pictures the artificial toying with elemental emotions that characterizes the life of social decorum; and finally, in which The clean bones crying in the flesh are the symbol of her desire to free herself of useless surface adornments to permit the expression of the deeper perceptions of her poetic imagination as symbolized by the title, Full Moon. This particular poem, by the way, is one of those usually cited as an evidence of Wylie's desire to escape. Escapism, it seems, is in the point of view.

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1. Van Doren, Carl: Op. Cit., P. 219
2. Van Doren, Carl: Op. Cit., P. 220

With Horace Wylie, Elinor continued her study and training. That the marriage, like her later marriage to William Rose Benét, was primarily a union of minds and intellectual interests, and not a complete spiritual and emotional union, is indicated by her recital of her last brief love for the Englishman celebrated in her sonnet cycle, One Person. Of this Van Doren writes:--[1]

> "Love is what it means to the lover, not to the bystander, and I could not question the reality of the tempest which wracked her..... What she and her sonnets together said was that this final love had come to her like first love, and had dissolved her to her youngest elements."

It should be clear that what had been a struggle for intellectual freedom against the conventions of a social decorum, had altered to become a personal, interior struggle between mind and emotion. Wylie was never able in life to effect a proper fusion between her emotional and intellectual needs. The urge to preserve her individuality became so strong within her that it had prevented her from full surrender to her emotions until the anonymous gentleman of the One Person cycle invaded her being.

Wylie had written:

> "I have believed that I prefer to live
> Preoccupied by a Platonic mind;
> I have believed me obdurate and blind
> To those sharp ecstasies the pulses give:...."
> (One Person: No. VI)

> "For I have moved companioned by a cloud,
> And lived indifferent to the blood's desire...."
> (One Person: No. V)

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1. Van Doren, Carl: Three Worlds, P. 239

She had, in reality, given that place to Shelley--remote and unable to wrack her with emotional compulsions that would be disruptive to her as a person--that she was unable to give to those who loved her.

There were other contributing causes to this final damming up of her emotions. There was first the scandal of her elopement with Horace Wylie. The social prominence of the Hoyts and the Hichborns was enough to insure great notoriety which was revived again at the time of Philip's suicide, at the time of Horace Wylie's divorce, and which hounded her in all her relations with the public. The effect of the recurrent scandal which attended her every move, the frigid chill to which Washington society subjected her, was severely trying to the delicately attuned personality that was Wylie.

More important, however, was her inner consciousness of having failed as a woman. She had left her two-year old son when she had eloped with Horace Wylie. It was "the one thing I have ever done that I think was bad.... And now I would rather have a child that I could think of as my own than anything else I shall ever have."[1] In connection with this, Eunice Tietjens[2] relates a curious and improbable revelation of Wylie's which has its foundation in the fact that Wylie had attempted several times to have children. Always, miscarriages brought on by "fear and resentment"[3] had resulted.

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1. Van Doren, Carl: Three Worlds, P. 219
2. Tietjens, Eunice: The World at My Shoulder, P. 190
3. Van Doren, Carl: Op. Cit., P. 219

The fear of failing again in the same situation in which she had behaved as an "utterly bad" woman, formed a basic element in Wylie's psychological pattern of behavior.[1] The consciousness of failure finds poetic expression in the early poem <u>This Hand</u>, in which Wylie writes:--

> "If I had seen a thorn
> Broken to grape-vine bud;
> If I had ever borne
> Child of our mingled blood;
>
> Elixirs might escape;
> But now, compact as stone,
> My hand preserves a shape
> Too utterly its own."

The same complex is at the basis of the childish incompetence with which Wylie met the demands of real life. She let a curious haze, half-legend, half-fact, obscure the simplest facts of her life; she enjoyed pretending she was two years younger than she was; she ruled regally as "poet and queen of poets in Manhattan" and enjoyed the pomp and show of her position; she was childishly hurt at any slight, imaginary or unconscious; she was extremely jealous of her reputation as a beauty--only her sense of humor kept this latter vanity from becoming unendurable.

> "She was a woman who had beauty and genius. Beauty compelled her and genius compelled her, both of them without always giving her simple motives for her compulsions. Doubly driven, she was doubly sensitive.... Within a few moments she could be suspicious and ingenuous, insolent and tender, capricious and steadfast, desperate and hilarious, stirringly

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1. Van Doren, Carl: <u>Three Worlds</u>, P. 219

profound and exquisitely superficial."[1]

These self-contradictions were apparent to Wylie. Mary Colum writes of her that Wylie had no natural facility for dealing with everyday occurrences, but that she:--[2]

> "was as little subject to self-deception as a mortal could be.... In that remote fastness of spirit to which she could always withdraw, she avoided no knowledge, self-knowledge, or any other sort of knowledge."

Wylie's self-knowledge is apparent in many poems which show a keen awareness of the inconsistency between her essential idealism and her everyday functioning. It was because of this discrepancy that Carl Van Vechten wrote of her:--[3]

> "The facts of her life as they have been related to me were at complete variance with her character as I was acquainted with it.... I turn rather to her work, in the best of which is to be rediscovered the beautiful essence of her nature."

Yet the inescapable fact is that both lives--the artistic and the personal, with all their seeming inconsistencies-- spring from the same basic and complex human personality.

It is always dangerous to posit a single motif as the shaping core of an individual personality. Yet, in the case of Elinor Wylie, it seems apparent that the profound conviction of her innate worth as an individual and, with it, her right to function freely either in or out of society, was the

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1. Van Doren, Carl: Op. Cit., Pp. 235-6
2. In Memory of Elinor Wylie; New Republic, Feb. 6, 1929
3. Wylie, Elinor: Collected Prose; Preface to Jennifer Lorn, Page 8

well-spring of her real and artistic careers. We have seen that this "fanatical" pride had led her to turn her back upon the decorative social existence to which she had been reared. Intellectually, the break was a clean one. Her emotions could not so easily be brought under control, however, for her roots went deep in her Philadelphia culture--the society from which she now found herself cut off. Under the goadings of the recurrent scandals and of her own inner sense of guilt, she chose to shut away the strong emotive impulses which had tricked her into failure. Against the possibility of further hurt, Mrs. Wylie erected the armour of her cherished beauty and her gallant wit. The cost in emotional strain of preserving her 'armour' was very great, as her excessive vanities, her frequent tantrums, and her easily aroused suspicions of persecution, testify.[1]

In her art, the same "fanatical" pride appears as the drive for perfection which is evidenced in the wide and thorough research, in her finely textured prose, and in the firm discipline of her short poetic forms. Here, too, the affective elements of her nature find controlled expression. Wylie almost never writes in the grip of strong emotion--she writes, rather, with a percipience and intensity that is possible only when an emotion, its causes, effects, its ultimate meaning, have been realized. She escapes, therefore,

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1. Tietjens, Eunice: <u>The World at My Shoulder</u>, 192-193

the too easy indulgence in emotion *per se* which is frequently the curse of the feminine lyricist. Her excellence in the mastery of the emotional material of her art has, however, further confused those critics who write of "a passion frozen at its source," and dwell upon her "jewelled," highly "intellectualized" art.[1]

Nor did the awareness of this inviolable spirit which so shaped her life, ever lessen. From the earliest poems to the last magnificent *Birthday Sonnet*, this was the ultimate reality to which Wylie clung. Out of her self-knowledge, Wylie could write:--

> "How many faults you might accuse me of
> Are truth, and by my truthfulness admitted!
> ----------
> Fanatical in pride, and feather-witted
> In the world's business: if your tongue had spitted
> Such frailties, they were possible to prove.
>
> But you have hit the invulnerable joint
> In this poor armour patched from desperate fears;
> This is the breastplate that you cannot pierce,
> That turns and breaks your most malicious point;
> This strict ascetic habit of control
> That industry has woven for my soul.
> (*Sonnet*)

This 'soul' was fiercely and jealously guarded against any intrusion. The *Birthday Sonnet*, written the day before her death, rings proudly with her plea to the "Lord of Hosts"--

> "Marry her mind neither to man's nor ghost's
> Nor holier domination's, if the costs
> Of such commingling should transport or change her;
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1. Untermeyer, Louis: *Modern American Poetry*, P. 320

Instruct her strictly to preserve Thy gift
And alter not its grain in atom sort;
Angels may wed her to their ultimate hurt
And men embrace a spectre in a shift
So that no drop of the pure spirit fall
Into the dust: defend Thy prodigal."

Elinor Wylie's last seven years saw the publication of four novels and three volumes of verse. When we consider the precision and finish of her art, this constitutes a really unique performance, and becomes all the more amazing in the light of our knowledge of her physical, as well as mental, distress. As Cabell writes (and only a Cabell could be thus witty at the expense of a person's unhappiness), "she had, after marrying several of them, discovered that the world was full of disappointments."[1], and her capacity for real fullness of experience was transferred to artistic creation. The drive for expression persisted against her bodily distresses and against the often repeated warnings of physicians.

"It was no doubt partly her abnormal condition which so sped up her imagination and her energy. Her vitality---flourished at the cost of desperate nervous strain." (1.)

And out of the struggle against illness, out of the inner struggle against her consciousness of failure, "there came to birth, in these later years, a new and powerful personality."[2] It was as if a

"strong and non-human spirit, passionate but detached,.....laughing without prejudice

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1. Cabell, James Branch: Sanctuary in Porcelain; Virginia Quarterly Review, July, 1930
2. Wilson, Edmund: In Memory of Elinor Wylie; New Republic, Feb. 6, 1929

over the disasters of the hurt creature
it inhabited" (1.)

had taken possession of her.

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1. Wilson, Edmund: In Memory of Elinor Wylie; New Republic, February 6, 1929

Chaptter IV

FOUR SYMBOLIC NARRATIVES

We have said that the symbolism of her novels differs from that of her poetry in that it tends to be a freely created symbolism. Wylie builds an elaborate mosaic of original symbols--some complete within themselves, others composed of fragments that merge to become accumulative symbols. Her art lends symbolic overtones to a passing description, a brief experience, or to some few words of conversation. From many complex and single symbols she fashions the figures of her novels; she overlays the action with symbolic overtones so that the entire satire becomes, not a tale of people in action, but a revelation through numerous symbolic elements of the inner spiritual fabric of her individuals.

The lack of full-blooded vitality in her characters Wylie recognized and scored. She had written to Carl Van Doren that "the gutless Virginio" filled her with distaste; that she hoped her David and Shiloh would be "more alive and kicking."[1] Actually, however, one doubts that Wylie intended to create living characters. The role she chose was that of a satirist--and it is not a satirist's primary purpose to create living personalities, but to satirize certain traits,

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1. Van Doren: Three Worlds, Page 230

tendencies, foibles, and weaknesses of mankind. If, in passing, the satiric novelist can infuse some life into her symbolic characters, and thus arouse in the reader emotions of sympathy, of like or dislike, for them, so much the better for the purpose of the novelist.

This secondary purpose, Wylie achieved. Each of her main characters acquire living reality in addition to their existence as symbols. Each minute facet of Gerald's total self is presented to us in brilliant array; he becomes, as it were, a synthesis of various bits spun about the type of arrogant eighteenth-century male that Wylie desired to satirize. And Gerald achieves living reality--as do the majority of Wylie's symbolic-satiric characters--by means of the extensiveness of the satire, and, more important, by means of the brilliantly etched background of authentic, detailed material of her chosen environments, and by the interaction of her symbolic characters with non-symbolic and real minor characters.

The question as to the dividing line between type or symbolic, and real characters is difficult to draw, and is, in fact, outside the scope of this paper. With Wylie, however, it is apparent that the main characters are, first and foremost, symbols; secondarily, and because of completely realizable environments, creatures so nearly akin to reality that the intellectual play of the satire is heightened by our concurrent emotional response to them as vital, recognizable men and women.

The autobiographical element is clear in her novels as in her poetry. The novels are the result of Wylie's persistent examination of herself in relation to her world. The 'findings' are presented in masked allegory composed of carefully selected symbolic elements; in environments and times remote from her own present; and in an expression subtilized and freed from introspective morbidity by its symbolism, its elegant diction, and by the ironic half-smile which elevates all her art from too great subjectivism. She is, quite simply, using these usual "escapist" elements in an attack, devastating in its inclusiveness, upon various failings and weaknesses of her own time.

Jennifer Lorn

In a book which has been characterized as one of the most successfully sustained satires in the English language, it will be found necessary to limit our discussion of its satiric and symbolic elements to the main objects and methods of her satiric art. We shall first show the development of the three main symbols: Gerald, Jennifer, and Prince Abbas. Secondly, we shall endeavor to show the symbolic use of elements throughout the book--such as the chapter titles, descriptive fragments and single symbolic images--that serve to enhance and augment the main symbolic content of the novel. Realizing the extent to which Wylie subjected all that came within her range of experience to the sharply-glancing wit

of her pen, we must conclude that it is possible to hint, only, at the wealth of symbolic material.

Jennifer Lorn is, as we have said, a double allegory. It, first, attacks male arrogance and professed superiority as it is seen in a typical Englishman of the latter part of the eighteenth century, and as it emerges in the empty marital relationship of Gerald's life with Jennifer. Within this framework, Gerald appears as the supreme example of a conscienceless, heartless male ego; activated by the satisfactions of his own cold desires and his greed for personal advancement. Jennifer is the type of non-intellectual, ineffective woman, whose only course in a man-dominated world is to love and be loved. Unable to achieve emotional satisfaction in this sphere, Jennifer's life is, of course, a complete failure. Prince Abbas is a sort of reversed portrait of Gerald. Sentient, highly imaginative, childishly avid, innocent, and irresponsible, he embodies those qualities which Gerald lacks--and which would be essential to a harmonic relationship between Gerald and Jennifer.

In the second allegory, these characters emerge as the conflicting elements and desires of Elinor Wylie's personal experience. Gerald is the intellectual and aesthetic counterpart of these same dominant elements in Wylie's personality; Jennifer is a symbol of her chaotic and, finally, repressed emotional nature; Prince Abbas is a created symbol of the unconscious desire of Wylie to revert to a lovely,

sensuous, and irresponsible childlike state. Of this, the phantastic and idyllic sequence of Jennifer and Prince Abbas is a long, detailed symbol. In the book, as in her own life, the intellectual and artistic elements dominate. Gerald retains to the last his mastery over Jennifer, and the fear and terror of Jennifer, as well as the childlike impotency of Prince Abbas, combine to prevent any fervent consummation, or satisfactory release to the repressed emotional elements. When, logically, in the climax, Jennifer's emotions break through her repressions, she brings death upon herself through her own fears; Gerald's mastery is symbolized by means of her dying appeal to him for help. Jennifer's fear is, of course, a symbol of Wylie's own fear of strong emotional experiences. To Prince Abbas, the sudden resolution to take Jennifer for his own; the shock of her final appeal to Gerald; and the stress of her death, prove experiences that are too strong and violent for his childlike nature. Death is for him the only solution--a second symbol of Wylie's inner fear that to give into her emotions would mean the end of her individuality. Jennifer Lorn is, then, a revelation of the conflict in Wylie herself; the inevitable conclusion is that only through a harmonic relationship of the basic elements of a person's total character can a full life-experience be realized. It was Wylie's inability to achieve this balance, that resulted in her personal tragedy; it was the inevitable result of the pretensions of man to spiritual and intellectual

superiority, and the consequent treatment of woman as beautiful, doll-like, and essentially inferior, that brought about the tragedy of Jennifer Lorn.

The novel is divided into three books, the first of which establishes the character of Gerald, and lays the basis for the relationship between Jennifer and himself. The title of the first chapter, A Gross of Brass Knockers, is at once a symbolic summary of Gerald's traits; he is indeed, polished, urbane, and unfeeling in his brazen arrogance. The general quality of Gerald has been more than adequately summarized by Carl Van Vechten in his Preface to the novel:--[1]

> "Gerald, in fact, is incomparable, with his air of passive and polite contempt, his amiable and cold composure, thieving in India, the seat of his enormous fortune; Gerald, reading Candide and drinking brandy to relieve the tedium of an ocean voyage; Gerald, entertaining his wife during the honeymoon with long anecdotes which for the most part concerned her own family history with which she was entirely familiar;... Gerald astride an elephant on the road to Delhi, 'straight as a lance and stiff as a poker, accommodating himself in some uncanny fashion to the swinging pace of the monstrous animal; his face as immobile as a carven Buddha beneath the green umbrella which he habitually carried,' an umbrella--as 'awful as a sceptre and as ornamental as a lotus-flower'; Gerald....quoting Marlowe with a slightly satirical smile: Gerald, indeed, is the epitome of maleness with all its vanity and self-importance."

We see his elegant precision and superb self-control:--

> "he possessed a sort of cold and deadly skill at gaming, seldom exercised, but almost never without success." (Page 12)

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1. Collected Prose of Elinor Wylie: Preface, Page 8

This same "deadly skill" extends to his covert manipulations in the East India Company, whereby he amassed, ruthlessly and callously at the cost of friend and enemy alike, an enormous fortune.

> "Agreeable he undoubtedly was; highly agreeable with perfect manners, not too strikingly in evidence, and a wit just subtle and serene enough to please those most captious critics." (p. 13)

The ability to insinuate himself into favor, to govern his actions and words with just the proper blending of poise and wit, is the source of Gerald's success.

> "he was greedy for work, tireless, watchful, terrible with a sort of guarded and restrained passion... As he arose his associates came to fear him. The Scotchman, Macallister, maintained he was the devil, and Macallister feared him less than the others did.... the natives adored him; in dealing with them he always drew the velvet glove over the exceeding hardness of his hand, but the same hand was there, the same texture and weight of iron... his perfect firmness and impeccable suavity made him invaluable to the company and acceptable to the most pampered of rajahs. Here was a man who had every grace, every accomplishment; a man whose chess was as magnificent as his marksmanship; a man who could manage a horse or a political intrigue with light and masterly touch;...." (pp. 115-116)

Gerald, whose consciousness of his own supremacy was so great that he could afford to forego the usual trappings of luxury and splendor in his clothes; that he could afford to retain the menial title of Secretary in the East India Company while conscious of being its most influential factor; Gerald above all who could say of himself in answer to his wife's questionings:--

> "The say of me, as Candide said of the noble Venetian, 'Rien ne peut lui plaire.' I think in their hearts they are inclined to say also, in the words of the same simple fellow, 'Quel grand génie!'" (Page 67)

And, to show the accompanying callousness in his relationships with those who surrounded him, we find the following excerpts:-

> "Gerald was properly pleased to see his poor old father looking so well; he was now far too important a personage in his own right to have any lurking regrets about that." (Page 18)

Again, Gerald, sipping his wine and appreciating:--

> "the scent of a charming shell-pink climbing rose which he had saved from the builder's vandalism at the slight cost of horse-whipping a day laborer and threatening a carpenter's apprentice with a pocket-pistol." (Page 24)

The revealed sardonic contempt which Gerald had for his fellow-creatures, and his dispassionate endeavours to satisfy his aesthetic desires, provides the key to his relation with Jennifer--and the pattern of marriage as it then appeared to the understanding of Elinor Wylie. So we see Gerald, on his departure for England, accepting congratulations upon his marriage "simply and affably, without troubling to explain that as yet he had not selected his future wife." Again, we see Gerald, at first sight of Jennifer, drawing her father, Tam-Linn, aside and saying in "a quiet and admirably controlled voice, "I should like to ask for your permission to marry Jennifer." Then, having gained the consent of both Lord and Lady Tam-Linn, "his taste was much too perfect to permit of strutting; he went gravely and decorously behind her (Lady Tam-Linn)....; his slight bow to Tam-Linn was a

masterpiece of dignity and reserve." (Page 35)

The second chapter is entitled The Earl's Elzevir. The symbolic significance is revealed when the Earl lightly relinquishes Jennifer, with relief to find that she, and not the rare and priceless Cicero Elzevir, is the object of Gerald's greed.

> "Tam-Linn, who had thought that Gerald was going to attempt to buy the Cicero from him, was very much relieved. He had been surprised and embarrassed by the prospect of having to refuse his young friend's request; this was another matter." (Page 33)

Jennifer emerges then, as a desired objet d'art; she is to be merely one of Gerald's possessions, to be clothed, powdered, perfumed, and carefully preserved as a rarely beautiful object. Thus is set the pattern for their relationship; and thus is symbolized the arrogant male, possessing completely, as a chattel, his wife. Such a conception leads to the assumption that Jennifer exists only for his pleasure; her existence as an individual in her own right is not for a moment to be entertained.

There is, here, no question of emotional involvement on Gerald's part. The knowledge that we gain of Gerald's complete lack of emotion is built up by allusions to his waxen, bloodless skin; his brittle laughter and frigid voice; by the continual association with him of whiteness and transparency.

> "He (Gerald) stooped and brushed her small and chilly fingers with his lips, which did not lose the slightest part of their habitual compression in the act of gallantry. His eyes,

> however, pale, prominent, and now very lustrous in the firelight, devoured her with a curious intensity of gaze which seemed, mild and deliberate as a cat's tongue, to lick up the cream of her beauty and swallow it with quiet satisfaction."
> (Page 50)

Far from arousing jealous resentment, the attention which Jennifer attracted, brought him sardonic amusement. It was, after all, a reflection of his own good taste. So he could murmur the cryptic and dismissing phrase "Phoenixes and Pomander Boxes" at the sight of the attentive men, young and old alike, who surrounded Jennifer in the Pump Room at Bath. Let the attention come too close and seem to presume upon his exclusive ownership, and Gerald could react swiftly and cruelly as in the incident of the white roses which Gerald with "the utmost composure proceeded to stamp...into shreds;" or in the incident with Shah Alam, when, while Gerald was enjoying his gift of "snubbing without offence," Jennifer noticed that "the Shah's topaz gaze smouldered a little, but Gerald's eyes were cold as pebbles in a brook."

The <u>red jasper bowl</u> is the single symbol which sums up the actual part that Jennifer plays in Gerald's life.

> "The jasper bowl was too lovely to part from, even for a matter of hours; Gerald knew in his heart that he would never give it to his wife so long as he lived; at the moment he could almost have sworn that if it had come to a choice between them, he would have selected his newer acquisition to have and to hold forever."
> (Page 75)

The evident superiority of Gerald over the lesser frail humanity is signified by the immortality that Wylie implies

in the following symbolic images and incidents.

> "Enveloped in a fawn-coloured cloak of heavy Chinese silk, with his pale face burned by the sun to the exact shade of a delicately toasted biscuit,...he was a curious and commanding figure, the incarnation of some ivory idol of remote antiquity. His simple dignity far transcended that of any mere modern image of an eastern deity; the gates of Lhassa would assuredly have fallen before his majestic and inexpressive countenance." (Page 124)

This is but one of several references to Gerald as a "carven Buddha" and a fleshless, bloodless incarnation. There is, further, the snake incident in which Gerald bends down to rummage in the dust for the deadly karait, "the deadliest snake in India."

> "He stooped and deliberately rummaged in the dust at his feet, as if searching for the squirming threads of death it might contain; then he straightened himself, smiling a little, and carefully wiped his thin fingers on the handkerchief; against the bright silver sheen of the new silk the marks of his finger-tips were red." (Page 127)

Gerald survived; as he survived the attacks of the bandits, the seventeen wounds, and the stake seemingly driven through his heart. Relating the incident to a companion, Gerald says:

> "Returning to the spot where they had interred me, he (Mohammed, Gerald's servant) managed to remove the stones from my body, and found me to be alive, though desperately wounded. He was not surprised; he knew me very well, and had not supposed that I could be slain with any particular ease." (Page 193)

These symbolic elements which reveal the at least relative immortality of Gerald, are a composite symbol of the ruling importance Wylie gave to the intellectual and aesthetic

facets in her nature.

Our last view of Gerald is his detaching the Byzantine image from the unconscious fingers of Prince Abbas, as the latter lies upon the newly dug grave of Jennifer--Gerald seems quite unaware that it is the grave of his 'beloved' wife.

> "I believe this to be a Byzantine carving of great antiquity,' said Gerald to himself complacently as he stepped from the cypress grove.... 'The face bears a distinct resemblance to my late dear wife; this alone would render it valuable to me, but it is, quite apart from this consideration, an exquisite work of art. I am most fortunate to have procured it at the cost of so little expense of pain." (Page 211)

Gerald, like Elinor Wylie herself, would allow no strong emotional impacts to mar his composure. But neither did Gerald, for all his superiority, achieve any great satisfaction in life. His never-ending quest for more power, more riches, more jewels, symbolizes the emptiness of his life. And this is clearly symbolized by the incident of the red ruby, which Gerald had cherished for many years, finding no woman whose beauty was vivid enough to sustain the brilliance of the gem. Once he did see such a girl, but his sense of importance and of dignity prevented his hurrying after her.

> "Had he been able to subdue his natural sense of importance to the level of a little hurry this pretty idyll might have had another ending; its true consummation was no more than an old man preserving a lovely girl's virtue and his own majestic vanity at one and the same moment. He went home,....; he felt curiously thwarted and weary." (Pages 108-109)

The frustration of the elder Gerald reveals Wylie's awareness that such partitive experience cannot be wholly satisfactory; that the pleasures of the mind, of the aesthetic sensibility, need an underlying emotional element to make them truly vital.

Jennifer is first presented to us as a beautiful and rather useless young girl of seventeen. Wylie writes the following description of her:--

> "She was brought up to eat bread and butter, and milk and honey, and rice pudding, and strawberry jam for a treat. She was brought up to wear frocks of fine India muslin and to tie blue ribbons about her waist;...to sit on a green silk chair while her maid brushed her curls to splendour; to sit on a white bench and read Percy's Reliques;...." (Page 32)

Taken abruptly out of this idyllic existence, and hurried into a marriage for which she was in no sense prepared, Jennifer begins her long retreat from reality, and proceeds gradually to her death. From the shelter of her family, Jennifer enters the stifling shelter of her amazing husband's care. She becomes frightened, uncomprehending--Gerald has assured her that he will provide her with "a set of proper answers for all occasions"--but docile. Even the care of her beauty is now under Gerald's supervision; each garment, each jewel, each perfume must be of his choice.

The pattern of their marital relationship is revealed:--

> "She realized with respect that neither her own proximity nor that of the tiger could ever accelerate the measured pulses of her husband's blood;...." (Page 49)

> "She sat...., a delicate and fantastic creature overwhelmed by uncongenial grandeur; her little face seemed suspended upon its sumptuous background, as if she were the youngest and most beautiful of Bluebeard's wives, decapitated in her sleep, and still smiling." (Page 49)

> "she tried to picture him (Gerald) in a turban, with a perfumed mass of hair curling about his narrow jaw. It was hard to imagine; once imagined, it was horrible; the yellow waxen mask above the beard of indigo evoked abominable things." (Page 131)

In the above symbolic fragments, we come to perceive the emptiness which Jennifer finds in her love-less marriage. Gerald's appearance to her as a Bluebeard, evokes our recognition of the revulsion she experiences toward the husband who has refused her any status but that of a plaything and consort. Lacking a mutually understanding and self-respecting companionship, Jennifer is reduced to a vain, idle creature.

In two short passages, Wylie reveals Jennifer's premonition of the future she faced.

> "Then the vast black curtain of the future seemed to sway before her swimming eyes; it was all at once a portent, a thunder-cloud, a pillar of thick smoke; it grew like a tree, its broad trunk blotting out imagination, its branches obscuring time and space." (Page 52-3)

Again, at Gerald's command that she prepare to leave for India:--

> "Jennifer rose hastily, gathering the folds of her tunic and mantle over her arm; as she fled from the room the parquet flooring struck cold as the black ice of mid-winter through her flimsy gilt sandals." (Pages 90-91)

From this time on, Jennifer withdraws more and more from life; she "lived more than ever in a dream of lights and perfumes and unreal sounds." The seventh chapter of the second book bears the title, The Gradual Dusky Veil. The symbolic importance may be shown in the following excerpts:--

> "'Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word...' In peace; in darkness; in the shadow of death..... Peace was a beautiful thing." (Page 115)
>
> ---
>
> "'The gradual dusky veil.' Her eyelids closed; her whisper was an evocation." (Page 117)

The following chapter finds Jennifer sitting at the tomb of Jahanara:--

> "Below her silken ruffles, the epitaph spoke silently in stone to this effect: 'Throw only a few blades of grass upon my tomb; that is all which should conceal the last seclusion of the humble.'" (Page 132)
>
> ---
>
> "a vast equivocal figure had lifted its head to stare blindly into her face; now it confronted her in the dark looking-glass of the lily-pond. Shiva the terrible, the adored; Shiva the saint of solitude, of murder, and of suicide; Shiva who had married two wives, whose names were Idleness and Death." (Page 119)

Long before this revelation of Jennifer's urgent desire for peace, for death, for escape from the empty splendour and mocking hollowness of her life, we have seen Jennifer's reversion to the comparatively happy childhood of her memories. An often-repeated symbol of such reversion is Jennifer's singing of the Scotch Ballads of her childhood in moments of stress. Principally, however, we trace the

the reversion through the succession of brief episodes with her various admirers. Early in marriage comes the half-dreamed, half-real youth; the youth of the "black love-knot" whose description recalls Shelley to our mind.

> "'Madam,' he said,.....'do you wish me to save you?'.... 'Save me, sir? From what do I require to be saved?'
> He shook his head with a sort of vague and absent-minded despair;... he was gone.... she continued to feel a sharp and peculiar anguish of sorrow and fear." (Page 54)

And the episode with the young man in the Paris conservatory--

> "This time Jennifer felt the kiss upon her hair; the fact that the boy's light voice was so singularly like her brothers' seemed to make the caress a mere matter of course." (Page 79)

With Saint Amond, the French soldier, and a stranger to Jennifer, we find her making the following appeal:--

> "You are the first person whom I have seen since quitting Devonshire who was in the least like my father;.... Would you not.... accompany us on our journey? I should feel so much safer in your presence;...." (Page 123)

After her disastrous marriage to Gerald, Jennifer's reaction toward men was held within the bounds of a brother-sister, or father-daughter relationship. Only thus did she feel secure. Even with the charming Prince Abbas, her admission of love is hastily amended with "But as a sister; purely as a sister." And, later, she tries to console the Prince with visions of their flight to her English home, where "should our affections ripen into something more than fraternal sentiments, they (her parents) will bless our union and watch over us..."

Refusals such as these, to recognize or allow a mature man-woman relationship is the symbol of Jennifer's repression of her emotions, and of her flight from the demands of the responsibility of maturity; it is also, a symbol of Aylie's own reaction to the attempts of others to come too close to her innate being.

The character of Prince Abbas may be quickly sketched. He was a delicate youth, enjoying the minor sorrows he indulged himself in; existing, principally, it would seem, upon the aromas of the delicious foods he devoted his life to preparing; resorting to the scent, or nibbling the petals of roses in moments of stress; so carefully nurtured by his doting mother that he had never progressed from a child-like dependency and innocency. Delicate, sensuous, and greedily avid for the pleasures of aesthetic beauty, he yet had a naive dignity and composure of his own. Of him, his tutor--the most real and vital character in the book--said:--

> "Life's a strong fluid running from the conduits of heaven into our veins; pipe it through a little glass tube like yourself and the pressure is bound to be painful; the speed and spate of it will maybe crack you." (Page 138)

And the "speed and spate" of his desire and love for Jennifer did, indeed, crack the Prince. It is Father O'Donnell, also, who, seeing the bloodless purity and grace of Jennifer "alone had the wisdom and common-sense to pity so exquisite a

creature."

From the recognition by Prince Abbas of Jennifer as the incarnation of the Byzantine image--a small ivory figure of the Madonna--we are led to realize the purely ideal quality of the phantastic idyll of the young lovers. <u>white roses</u>, the <u>scent of honeysuckle</u>, the <u>song of birds</u>, and such ideal elements are to accompany their brief happiness, and to suggest its dreamlike ecstasy.

> "Their mutual affection was like one of those beautiful blue butterflies of Cashmere, so rare and so elusive, which exist in the upper regions of the air but seldom present themselves to mortal view." (Page 188)

Twelve days only do they have of perfect happiness in their flight from the dangers of the Sultan's desire for Jennifer. These twelve days find Jennifer amazed and delighted at the influence she has upon the mind of the Prince; they find her developing in strength and firmness of mind; they find a progression in Abbas who alters from a spoiled and peevish boy to an alert and resourceful young man. "They were, it appeared, a pair of expensive but sickly little pigeons hilariously transformed into meadow larks."

On the twelfth day, they are sharply brought back to reality. In the chapter named, <u>The Serpent in Persepolis</u>, the serpent in the form of Gerald enters into and disrupts their Paradise. It is inevitable that the chilling pattern of Jennifer's marriage should take ascendancy over the newly discovered happiness of the idealistic interlude.

There is the immediate relapse into fear, into submission on Jennifer's part.

> "It was my husband,.... I tried to call out to him, but I could not. How very tall he is, and his eyes--did you notice the colour of his eyes, Abbas? They are like ice over black water, and yet they are pale, like his face." (Page 194)

The return to Shiraz was slow and sorrowful; "an icy pressure constricted her (Jennifer's) heart, but her mind was firm, cool, and empty of all save a sense of decorum." As for the Prince, his only recourse was to return to his mother.

Upon the return to Shiraz, Jennifer is again captured by the Sultan. Within these last pages are several very important symbols which relate to Wylie's attitude--partly unconscious--toward the emotions. In the figure of the Sultan's procuress, we find a fully realized symbol of the results of a life devoted to sensual pleasures.

> ""The Banou had grown hideous in the service of sin and the indulgence of her own body, but her boldly curving nose, large brow, and sensual lips still possessed a trace of heavy symmetry and raddled bloom;.... To the girl, still struggling desperately in the grasp of the eunuchs, the face of the atrocious creature emerging from the thin folds of carmine silk seemed the picture of ultimate and perfected evil;...." (Page 199)

Another symbol is seen in the "living worm"--symbol of the repressed fear of her emotions--which "devoured her soul alive" as Jennifer lets herself be bathed and beautified in preparation for the Sultan. In her chamber, Jennifer feels within her veins "whistling blood" which "deafened her with

its thin insistence," as Jennifer awakens to a realization of her real love for Abbas.

> "The room was a channel for elemental fear and horror; around this larger circle she swung endlessly, as the planets swing about the sun. Surrounded and at the same time pierced through and through by several deaths, she was nevertheless awake and alive in the bright fever of every vein and nerve. At last, she lived; now she knew she must die." (Page 200)

Above Jennifer's head is suspended a bow-string, which, the Banou has warned her, will choke her to death should she attempt to escape. Against this warning, Jennifer stirs to listen to the Prince's call to her in the night:--

> "Jennifer moved upon her pillows with a violent effort of will; she leaned upon her elbow and listened. Then she lifted her head and looked straight at the bow-string; it writhed before her eyes like a green and golden snake." (Page 201)

In the urgency of her desire for Abbas, Jennifer leaps from the couch; the bow-string falls upon her throat; in an agony of fright and terror, Jennifer reverts again to Gerald's protection, and dies with his name upon her lips. The bow-string, however, had come unfastened; Jennifer "had died of pure fear." Clearly we see symbolized the fear of giving in to emotional compulsions that haunted Wylie during her life; in the fact that the bow-string was powerless since unfastened, Wylie reveals an inner realization of the possible beauty of emotional experience. The harm, the pain, of such experiences result from a mismanagement and fear of the emotions--this is the admission which Wylie here makes.

The last chapter, The Grove of Cypresses, depicts the tragic end of both Jennifer and the Prince. For the Prince, hearing in the night Jennifer's appeal to Gerald, has suffered great emotional shock--he returns to his home, but the realization of Jennifer's death recalls him to his futile love; in the night, he and Father O'Donnell pray over the grave. As the Father leaves, in a gesture of restitution, he places in Abbas' hands the little Byzantine image; with this in his hands, Abbas dies upon the grave; the "speed and spate" of their desire had been too much for their frail flesh.

Gerald has his final triumph as he takes the image of the Madonna--final symbol of the greater permanence and enduring quality ~~to~~ which she attributed to the intellectual and aesthetic aspects of the personality.

The Venetian Glass Nephew

The critic of The Venetian Glass Nephew is quite tempted to list excerpts from the book, and to let them speak for its excellence. We must, however, be content with a mere mention of its sparkling erudition, its pictorial elegance, and its gay wit. Wylie has, within its small compass, achieved what must surely be one of the most learned books in fiction. Here, as in Sterne's Tristram Shandy, the wealth of allusions is handled dextrously so as to become an intrinsic part of the fabric of the book. To find its equal in picturesque and minute detail, we must quite possibly turn to the novels of Flaubert. Unlike that of Flaubert, however, the weight of Wylie's learning does not hang too heavily upon the slender, imaginative structure of The Venetian Glass Nephew, due, in part, to the fact that Wylie chose a strangely picturesque period in which to spin her fable. In addition, the entire book is lighted up by a laughing wit, an elegant and amused formality, which masks the book's underlying seriousness just as Wylie masked her personal unhappiness in the role of "queen of poets."

The fable has a many-sided satiric interest in addition to its main theme--the tragic inadequacy of humanity which accepts the show for the substance, the superficial for the real. Its heroine, Rosalba, has the necessary capacity for a full experiencing of life. In her are united strong

emotional and idealistic tendencies, a will-to-do, combined with the powers of an evaluative, intellective faculty. The fable is worked out in the tragic sequence of Rosalba's unequal marriage with Virginio--type of the artificial product of limited humanity. The tragedy is implicit in Rosalba's fate; to become a 'fit' mate for Virginio, she must forego her intrinsic excellence and, by submitting to the Ordeal by Fire, descend to Virginio's level.

The experiential basis for the book becomes apparent in a study of its symbolism. It is Rosalba's emotions which "enmesh" her in the web of marriage; it is under the influence of her emotions that she chooses to undergo the Ordeal by Fire and emerge as porcelain. A secondary, personal symbolism may be discerned in the figures of Rosalba and Virginio as symbolic of the two warring elements of Wylie's nature. In this light, Rosalba, the emotional element, is vanquished by Virginio, the intellectual-aesthetic element. It is a view similar to this personal symbolism that led Carl Van Doren to treat the book as a symbolic revelation of the conflict between Art and Nature. Such an interpretation seems to me to be an incomplete reading of the very careful and elaborate symbolism of the novel.

The secondary figures in the book are each symbols of particular qualities of mankind. We shall show briefly, the symbolic significance of these partitive characters, and then relate them to the more rounded characters of Virginio and

Rosalba.

We see Cardinal Peter Innocent Bon returning to Venice on his eighty-first birthday, "his eyes blue as veronica flowers,...even now full of a child's tears."

> "His heart was lighter than a flower; indeed it danced so high and airily, and teased the tenuous cord of his mortality with such persistent malice, that he conceived of it as a toy balloon, an azure plaything in a pantomime, caught by a thread of gold to stable earth, and germane to the sky." (Page 225)

> "His grey habit of the Seraphic Order fell from his shoulders, and he was a child again, in a coat of sapphire velvet, with a silver feather in his cap." (Page 228)

> "His mind moved happily in an atmosphere of miracles,.... He felt like a child who perceived at his first carnival a blue sky flowering with confetti,...." (Page 239)

As his name implies, Cardinal Innocent Bon was neither clever, nor wise. He is the spiritual aesthete; childlike in his innocence, and secure in a religious faith untroubled by intellectual doubtings. The Cardinal has, moreover, one long-cherished dream; he regards it as his Cross that he has no nephew. He has long prayed for one--it "did not occur to his charity" to regard the numerous nephews of his fellow cardinals "as a commodity procurable by other means than the help of God and the wedded happiness of one's brothers and sisters." His naive simplicity is further revealed by the

suspicion with which he views the sceptical Voltaire. In addition to the lack of great intellective powers, the Cardinal is limited in natural emotional powers. His "inmost soul was as a silver reliquary of chaste design." The emotional incapacity is developed in the scene when Rosalba kisses his hand:--

> "The fragility of those unresponsive and chilly finger-tips struck lightly yet insistently at her happiness, and she drew back in alarm, crying sadly:
> 'Oh, but you too, you too! You shiver and break when I touch you! Are you made of ice, that you cannot bear the little weight of my hand?'" (Page 289)

From the association with him of the <u>silver feather</u>, the eyes like <u>blue veronica flowers</u>, the <u>heart like a blue balloon</u>, and the accumulative symbols quoted above, the Cardinal emerges as a symbol of a purely spiritual-aesthetic existence, incomplete and childlike without the understanding of the intellect and the warmth of emotion.

Chastelneuf, the creator of Virginio, is a masked Casanova. It is he who insists that Virginio be created on Friday, the proper day for an "amorous operation;" it is he who remarks when the Cardinal announces the name of Virginio:--

> "A pretty name, but I trust it may not long be strictly appropriate; I have spared no pains to make our young friend a complete work of art, after the best natural patterns." (Pages 253-4)

It is, finally, he who understands Rosalba's unhappiness, and who sorrowfully proposes the remedy for it. Not, however,

before he has revealed his love for her to Rosalba--"the love of mortal for mortal," not to be discovered in the "hollow veins of Virginio, or among the noble ganglions of Querini's intellect." And, at the candid gaze of Rosalba:--

> "Chastelneuf experienced a pang of extreme humiliation;... The wrinkles upon his face were deepened as by acid, and his falcon look grew weary with the recollection of unrestful years." (Page 295)

As a chevalier, Chastelneuf is witty, clever, and, of course, incurably amorous. As an elderly man, he realizes the emptiness of a life devoted to the satisfaction of his amorous desires. In Chastelneuf are revealed both the need for emotional satisfaction, and the necessity for the more lasting experiences of the mind and spirit.

Querini is the philosopher, kindred, in his scepticism, to Voltaire:--

> "His was a mind so purely rational that it had long since demanded and received absolute divorce from his naturally impetuous heart. In this way his head was enabled to breathe the invigorating airs of philosophic disgust, while his heart enjoyed to the full a life-long orgy of benevolence;...." (Page 253)

The limitations of a life dedicated to reason are revealed when Rosalba, in response to Querini's demand that her course of action be reasonable, says:--

> "Reason is for old gentlemen, like you and M. de Voltaire; the chevalier understands my determination." (Page 298)

The profound scepticism in his view of life in general leads

Querini to withdraw from real contact with life. He finds his pleasure in his great library in the study of the past philosophers. His lack of faith prevents him from making any contribution toward the progress of man; his attempted stifling of his emotions makes him useless in the crisis with Rosalba.

Count Carlo Gozzi is the symbol of the imaginative faculty. He, as the writer of numerous fairy tales, is ever delighted with airy conceits and fables. He says of himself, "In vain have I attempted to be philosophical, which is merely to say heartless;..." As an imaginative man, he has an intuitive perception of spiritual significance in life, which is revealed in the following excerpt:--

> "'You are a cleverer man than I, Peter,' said Carlo Gozzi, who believed in elves. He said it in humility, for sometimes he believed in angels." (Page 277)

Gozzi's equal friendship with the Cardinal and Chastelneuf, "the powers of light and semi-darkness," does, in itself, argue the lack of stability and of awareness of moral values. Gozzi is excessively romantic, enjoying for itself each and every new experience, and delighting in the fanciful visions of his imagination.

These four carefully differentiated portraits present the essential qualities necessary for a complete and coherent understanding and appreciation of life. Emotion, reason,

imagination, and an intuitive perception of spiritual significance in all the phases of life, are needed to complete the full cycle of possible experience. This idealistic view, closely related to Emerson's transcendental philosophy, emerges in all of Wylie's writing, and is at the basis of her artistic perspective.

In the tragedy of Rosalba and Virginio, we shall see the emptiness of life that lacks in the capacity for full acceptance of the possible richness of life. And we shall see in her revelation of the tragic forces that prevent the fullest possible development of an individual personality, the emergence of Wylie's Puritan independence and integrity.

The character of Virginio may be quickly sketched. He is the product of the glass-blowing skill of Luna, and the higher forms of divine magic as practised by Chastelneuf. The symbolic chapter title, <u>Creature of Salt</u>, reveals him to us as a creature who is unable to bear too rough contact with life, lest he be dissolved and ruined. As an artificial product of man's skill, he lacks both a soul and the capacity for deep emotion.

> '"My dearest uncle,..." he cried with fastidiously restrained emotion,...while two bright glassy tears, volatile as quicksilver, fell shining through the air.' (Page 251)

> "he is an exquisite monster, a celestial prodigy, blown from the very air itself, and captured in an earthy net so fragile that its

> meshes could not withstand the violence of a mortal soul." (Page 270)

Virginio has a surface beauty, an ease and elegance of manner; he is "poetically acute"--Chastelneuf has seen to that--and he has a sufficient intelligence, and an inclination for good. The thirteenth chapter of the second book has the title, Spiritual Fathers. Revealed as the "spiritual fathers" of Virginio, are Lozzi, Chastelneuf, and the Cardinal; their limitations are repeated in Virginio, and as each of them has failed to achieve complete experience in life, so will Virginio be unable to sustain the richness of experience which Rosalba offers.

Rosalba, as we have said, contains within herself, latent possibilities for rich and vital living. She is the daughter of Bernis, a Cardinal, and the ward of Querini.

> "Rosalba was more vital than opening roses or ripened fruit; she lived and moved and burned....with a palpable warmth; she was a flame whose consummation may be bitter, but whose promissory blooming is tenderer than apple blossoms." (Page 258)

As the ward of Querini, we find Rosalba to be unusually intelligent--indeed, her verse and her wit had earned her the title of the Infant Sappho when she was but twelve years old. Her classical culture, acquired under Querini, is balanced by her own innate desires: Querini keeps her dressed in sombre black, Rosalba longs for a yellow gown; Querini gives her ancient Latin, Greek, and Medieval French, Rosalba reads

Gozzi's fairy tales with delight; nor has Querini been able to foster in Rosalba his own deep-seated scepticism, for Rosalba, while scoffing at Christian superstitions, is herself "a deist."

The emphasis is placed, however, upon the underlying spiritual and emotional qualities in Rosalba. She is the natural and complete woman; about her figure Wylie weaves a web of roses--the flower of passion, of associations with foxes, fauns, lions, and lambs--symbols of spiritual, emotional, and aesthetic elements in Rosalba's character. She is "the burning and spiritual child of love, who wore a wild beast's pelt above a heart more vulnerable than a little lamb's."

The keynote of Rosalba's marriage is expressed in the quotation at the head of the third book: "But some, and these the elect among gardeners, will always prefer China Roses." Rosalba, the elect, has a premonition of what her marriage to Virginio, the China Rose, will be; her love for Virginio overcomes her hesitations.

> "Her hand was warm and vibrating with life; Virginio's was cold and thin, and as she clasped it, an ominous cracking startled her with strangeness,... Rosalba looked at her own palm, where a tiny scratch showed scarlet;... Suddenly she was afraid; she stared at the boy in an enchantment of horror." (Page 261)

> "Rosalba, until this moment free as a hummingbird nourished at the Muses's hands, felt the meshes of a sudden net envelop her in its invisible gossamer." (Page 263)

Caught in the meshes of the unequal marriage, neither Virginio nor Rosalba are happy. Chastelneuf, seeing the lovers' frustration, was likewise aware that Rosalba was "the sadder by an infinity of pain."

> "Although in her brilliance she was fire to Virginio's crackling ice, the chevalier remembered suddenly that the essential substance of that element is delicate and tender and more malleable than the very air, whereas ice is denser even than water, and often hard as a stone. And he reflected truly that it was Rosalba's spirit that must inevitably be wounded...." (Page 297)

Rosalba, turned back in the richness of her offering to Virginio, finds that he cannot support the wealth of her being; that it is she who must make the sacrifice. The tragic realization is symbolized by many allied symbols: the chapter in which she faces her problem is called <u>Burning Leaf</u>--and Rosalba is herself the burning leaf; her eyes are "wild and acute as those of a trapped vixen;" she is saved from the <u>bonfire</u> of her frustrations by Chastelneuf:--

> "'There is a bonfire in the garden,' he threw back over his shoulder, like an irreverent glove. The challenge...seemed flung directly at Virginio's bloodless and impassive face." (Page 295)

The incapacity of Virginio to endure the full strength and splendour of Rosalba, and of life itself, is symbolized by the words of Rosalba:--

> "I lie in his arms at night; my breath is stilled because I love him, and his kisses close my lips over my laughter and my eyelids over my tears. But in the morning when there is no more moonlight, and the sun is shining

> with the insistence of a golden trumpet made fire instead of sound,.... Then when I wake and look at him he is afraid. He trembles; when I spring up in the sunshine he trembles at my side;.... I tell you, it is too difficult; I cannot bear it, and I would rather die than have it so." (Page 299)

Rosalba herself can embrace both the soft light and life symbolized by <u>moon</u>, and the strong radiance and vigour symbolized by <u>sun</u>.

> "the sun and moon crossed swords above her head; under this pointed arch of light she ran into the room." (Page 288)

Denied death, Rosalba with a look that "was brave and vibrant and alive" accepts Chastelneuf's solution: as the richer, the stronger of the two, she must undergo the <u>Ordeal By Fire</u>. The sacrificial character of the ordeal is symbolized in the following passage after the lovers' farewell embrace before Rosalba leaves for Sevres:--

Rosalba observes--

> "without surprise that both her wrists were faintly flecked with blood, as though a bracelet of thorns had lately clasped them." (Page 307)

From the ordeal Rosalba returns:--

> "her attitude had the grace of a bird arrested in flight, a flower flexible but unmoved by wind. Peter Innocent knew instinctively that her spirit was unstirred by any pang that may not be suffered by an exemplary child of seven." (Page 313)

The following symbols are but a few of the many that lift the fragile fairy story out of fancy and into an authen-

tic realization of the tragedy of a marriage that results in the lowering of the finer spirit to the level of the weaker. Chastelneuf says of the ordeal (we should note the ironic inversion of this symbol: it usually signifies a beneficent flame that purges the dross and immaterial elements away; here it purges Rosalba's very integrity, her independence, and her rich spiritual and emotional powers.):--

> "I have known fathers who submitted their daughters to the ordeal, husbands who forced it upon their wives...." (Page 303)

and after the ordeal the woman emerges--in the bitter words of Chastelneuf:--

> "Yes, she may live, and flourish, and be fair and decorous and delightful.... But--she will be porcelain; fine porcelain, remember, and no longer clay. In a porcelain vessel filled with clear water a rose may live for a little while, but out of clay a rose may rise alive and blooming, set on the roots of elder roses. There is a difference, but it does not matter." (Page 303)

The fable is not yet ended: "in the profoundest caverns of his heart" the Cardinal had felt that "love moved, answering her (Rosalba) from a dream." In a lyric, half-dreamed passage, Innocent Bon comes to a full realization of the meaning of the sacrifice. At the moment for the ordeal, Innocent Bon sees a "portent from heaven," as the fire on the hearth "appeared to lift its terrible head in anger." The cardinal, in an agony of self-reproach and despair, turns to Rosalba:--

> "'God give you peace,' said Rosalba to Peter Innocent, with a gentle candour unaware of pity and its intolerable demands." (Page 314)

And so the lovers will go on--"having forgotten fear and the requirements of pity," hurrying "to a fashionable pastry cook's to eat whipped cream and wafers."

"Whipped cream and wafers!" Thus the book ends, and in a fairy tale of sparkling wit and fancy, Wylie writes a piercing condemnation of the artificialities of modern life and of marriage. In an authentic use of symbolism, of her artistic imagination, Wylie presents one of the most tragic problems of life--how a rarely gifted and complete spirit may live "in a world of porcelain and Murano mirrors." Since Wylie is concerned with the particular problem of the independent integrity of woman, the tragedy centers about Rosalba. In a wider sense, however, it is the problem that any man or woman faces in an unequal union--the richer must ever subtract from his substance to reach the level of the lesser. That the solution demands the subjugation of the natural emotional compulsions in Rosalba, is a reflection of Wylie's mistrust and fear of her own emotions. It is also a realization, perhaps consciously admitted by Wylie only once (in her <u>One Person</u> sonnet sequence) that it is the emotional life which remains the basis of, and lends significance to, the intellectual-aesthetic experiences of the mind and spirit.

The Orphan Angel

The Orphan Angel offers us a very different problem than either of Wylie's previous novels. It is, first, an allegorical biography of Shelley, presented in the framework of a created and wholly fictional account of what Shelley's life might have been, had he been rescued in the Gulf of Spezzia and brought to America. It is, in a wider sense, an attempt to find what place such an idealist and essential romantic might have taken in primitive America. And, by further extension, it is Wylie's autobiography of the mind and spirit of herself, as a representative creative and imaginative being, in relationship with her practical, every-day world. It is, lastly and as a secondary interest, a satiric revelation of primitive America as it really was, and not as the fondly doting descendants of the first Americans conceive it to be.

In the person of Shiloh, Wylie builds up a remarkably perceptive study of Shelley, catching his very great idealism, his resourcefulness, his bravery, and his vigour. Conscious of the especial excellence of Shelley, Wylie does not hesitate to ridicule those traits of his which are too often the only basis for the popular conception of the poet. In other respects, Wylie achieves a high distinction--in the reconstruction in accurate detail of frontier and wilderness life, in the minute tracery of the travels of Shiloh and David, and

in the varied gallery of frontier characters whom the pair encounter in their search for Silver. And in her diction, too, Wylie often maintains an eloquence that is reminiscent of Shelley's own prose style, as well as re-creating--not always successfully--the plain speech of the frontiersman.

With all these disparate excellences, however, the novel must yet be classed as inferior in comparison with Wylie's other works. It is quite possible that Wylie, because of her adoration for Shelley, could not maintain an objective attitude toward the novel which concerned him. Certainly it is true that the detached and ironic amusement which lights her other novels is too seldom present in this. It is true also that the magnitude of the task Wylie set for herself defeated her own ends. Wylie's art is characteristically miniature, and in this longest work of all there are too many evidences of an overstraining of her especial talent into a mould too large for it. Mr. Cabell's judgement that the novel "is the most gloomy error in all literary history"[1] is, although an over-statement, a reflection of the flaws in control of her material and in composition. There is too much effusive rhetoric, too great a refinement of Shelley's speech, which leads Wylie into sheer bathos where she had meant to achieve sublimity. The reader is, in addition, sometimes shocked by sudden descents from exalted rhetoric into Wylie's use of the plain vernacular of the

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1. Cabell, James Branch: Sanctuary in Porcelain; Virginia Quarterly Review, July, 1930

of the commoners. These diverse styles don't--to adopt Wylie's own abrupt shiftings of idiom--always 'jell', although in many instances the artistic functioning of the two styles clearly delineates the problem that Wylie is here attempting to resolve.

The story relates the travels of Shiloh, the rescued Shelley, and David Butternut, his rescuer, from Boston to Kentucky, to Louisiana, across the Santa Fé Trail, and into California, in search of Sylvie le Croix, sister of Jasper Cross whom David had unwittingly and in self-defense killed. For David the search is motivated by his desire to make atonement to the orphaned Sylvie; for Shiloh, it constitutes a seventh and last search for his ideal of beauty. The novel reveals Shiloh's painful comprehension of himself and of the impossibility that he will ever find in a mortal the consummation of his ideal visions. Sylvie, then, is left to David, type of practical idealist, and Shiloh, in the final chapter, <u>Doubtless There Is a Place of Peace</u>, is left with the understanding that his happiness will be found in a life of artistic creation.

The name <u>Shiloh</u> given to Shelley, reveals Wylie's intention. It is a reference to that verse in Genesis which prophesies the coming of a long-awaited Saviour, Shiloh. The problem is whether Shiloh--or any idealist--can, by his supreme goodness, idealism, and perception, lead the world

out of its grossness and materialism, and find within the world, happiness for himself. Shiloh is first and foremost compounded of a "happy simplicity" and "essential goodwill;" he is wise, generally in an unworldly way, but can be resolute and quick to act when action is necessary. In the opening chapters of the book, which correspond to Shelley's youth, we find Shiloh torn between the urgings of his romantic idealism and his sense of duty. When Captain Mfoulkastle of the rescue ship questions Shiloh about the proposed search for Sylvie while the latter's wife and child still remain at Lerici, we see the evidence of this inner conflict in Shiloh:--

> "The delicate mask of tranquility upon Shiloh's face was shattered.....,.. A singular look of apprehension crept into those eyes, tired, yet painfully alert and brilliant. He had all at once the air of a hunted thing, a wild deer, fragile and untamed, and the brightness of his eyes was amazing." (Page 362)

The "look of apprehension" which crept into Shiloh's eyes is one with the reaction of the boy Shelley against his father--a conservative and unintelligent man whose only concern was conformity to public opinion. We remember that so great was Shelley's revulsion toward the father who came to stand to him for all manner of hateful pressure, that it was Dr. Lind, his schoolmaster, alone who could quiet the boy's fear, when he lay ill of a fever, that his father would commit him to a mad-house. No less real was this basic struggle between idealism and social conformity to Elinor Wylie--as we saw it

in her decision to leave her first husband and child.

And again this undeviating pride of Shiloh in the freedom of his soul is revealed when he replies to David's protest as to the lack of caution and common sense in some of Shiloh's activities:--

> "I prefer not to probe the corrupt and pitiful suspicions which convention engenders in maggot-broods within the human mind." (Page 409)

In this proud scorn of "pitiful suspicions" we find the basis for Shelley's defiant assumption of the term of <u>Atheist</u> which was hurled at him in his junior year at Oxford--a term which the reader of his letters of that period and of his later <u>Essay on Christianity</u>, or of his <u>Prometheus Unbound</u>, knows to be undeserved. In a similar scorn of public opinion we may discern, also, Mylie's silent acceptance of the hatred which was heaped upon her as a result of her actions. These two excerpts reveal the essential problem of the idealist, conscious of his own purity, certain of his right to the expression of his individuality, and yet painfully aware of the shackles which convention would impose upon his freedom. The symbol <u>deer</u> is a reference to the poetic imagination which must be free in order to survive; the suggestive phrase <u>maggot-broods</u> reveals the dreariness in the unimaginative life of the average man which, in Shiloh's poetic understanding, was the result of blind and limiting social convention.

As Shiloh's companion, Wylie presents the vivid and delightful David Butternut, son of New England, possessing its best elements. He is strong, lusty, and brave, with a simple and profound sense of religious faith imparted to him by his parents, and an intuitive, though shy, imaginative awareness. He has rescued Shiloh--it is he who gave Shelley that name--and has accepted him with a simple faith as a life given to him in return for the life he had taken. It is this inner conviction that Shiloh is the sign of God's forgiveness which restrains David's anger and impatience whenever the poetic impulses of Shiloh carry him too far from the path of common sense. Thus the blend of the practical and the mystical in David permit his acceptance and intuitive recognition of Shiloh's peculiar excellence at the same time that his greater practicality can question the wisdom of his friend's unconventional actions. David is the symbol of those missing elements in Shiloh, and in Wylie, which would permit their greater effectiveness in meeting the demands of real life. He is the crystallization of the type of practical idealist which Wylie had for so long admired--a type which constitutes the main stream of American thought. He is the type of practical adaptability to reality toward which the later and more matured Shelley progressed; we may trace within this 'autobiography' the development within Shiloh toward a firmer understanding of his responsibilities in relation to his world.

Silver is the type of ideal beauty for which Shiloh was constantly searching. Her full name, Sylvie la Croix, or Silver Cross, as she is known in the main body of the narrative, reveals the beauty and purity she assumes in Shiloh's poetic imagination. Silver takes her place as the last of Shiloh's seven lovely imprisoned princesses. There was, first, Harriet Westbrook, to be rescued from the tyranny of Mrs. Fenning's school; his wife, Mary, freed from "a cruel stepmother...and the loneliness of unfulfilled desire, now angered and saddened beyond his comprehension;" Claire,"for whom even love was lacking in flavour unless it were spiced with ferocity;" Emilia Viviani, "poor captive bird" of whom, after the inevitable disenchantment Shelley had written, "I think one is always in love with something or other; the error lies in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of that which is, perhaps, eternal."; Jane Williams of the "cool hands," and "cool and delicate spirit" in whom perhaps there had lain a "sleeping and unawakened Psyche;" and, in this novel, Melissa Daingerfield, still a child, whom Shiloh had left with "the ghost of a kiss" in the protection of her uncle. Shiloh's conscious recognition both of his failure to achieve the realization of his visions and of the heartbreak he had brought into his princesses' lives is revealed when he says:--

> '"But I am afraid that I am an excessively poor hand at rescuing people," said Shiloh, and opened his own eyes upon reality.' (Page 533)

In this short quotation is found Shelley's reaction to his ill-advised marriage to Harriet, and a regret concerning the relationship between Mary and himself. The quotation is, more widely, a commentary upon Shelley's youthful personal attempts to reform the world during that period when he was most under Godwin's influence; the period of his vain political activities in Ireland, or at Lynmouth, where he tried to disseminate his tract, The Declaration of Rights, by sending copies of it up in balloons or launching them on the sea in bottles. This period finds representation in Shelley's poetry in the intemperate--although not so radical as it has been painted--idealism of The Revolt of Islam, and Queen Mab.

This disillusion is heightened in a later incident when Shiloh realizes that:--

> "He had never wanted to hear from Mary; his cold dread of being scolded transcended all the other and more romantic emotions which Mary's accusing grey eyes could arouse in his bosom.
>
> The knowledge neatly stripped a layer of self-esteem from a soul always susceptive to the point of agony;...." (Page 493)

We may insert here our opinion that Wylie is somewhat prejudiced in her attitude toward Mary. She felt very strongly that Mary had brought much unhappiness to Shelley through her coldness and frequent anger. It is no doubt true that the Shelleys' life was often disrupted, but surely Mary had sacrificed much--she had watched her children die in the unfavorable Italian climate, she had suffered through several

of Shelley's platonic loves for his ideal 'princesses', and she had, to add to these troubles, been ill much of the time herself. These considerations should at least lighten the dislike which Wylie bore towards her, although it is true that Mary's intelligence and understanding could not meet on equal terms with Shelley's.

For the present, to Shiloh all these disappointments were in the "fair but tragical" past; the future was to be different, and Silver is the future, the seventh dream. "Like a saintly doll she glittered in a niche of stars." Shiloh has yet to learn that he will always find his princesses mortal and stained with mortality's imperfections.

Shiloh and David's travels across the continent lead them into all kinds of environments and all types of people. There is a profusion of portraits, many of them remarkably acute and real, representing the many phases of frontier life. Among them are the fanatic preacher who oppresses Shiloh's more exalted sense of spiritual rightness (and we are at once reminded of Mr. Shelley's fumbling attempts to reform his son by resorting to Paley's Natural Theology); Mr. Bumbolow, the besotted tavern keeper, ex-pirate and outlaw, moved by the appeal of Silver's beauty; Mr. Daingerfield, the degenerate and dissolute southern gentleman, who alternately beats his daughter, Melissa, and weeps over his inability to provide for her proper training; and, finally, there are the

Lillies--the father an insensitive and popular 'good-fellow', the mother, meek and long-suffering, and Rosalie of the fussy prettiness and surface refinement. With these, as with the majority of those people whom Shiloh encounters, he experiences disappointment and distaste. Wylie's artistic integrity emerges in her revelation that there were relatively few places and even fewer people in early America, or in present day America, who could at once sustain the preternatural brilliance and goodness of the type of idealist which Shiloh represents, and who could afford him any understanding friendship.

The disappointment which Shiloh encounters in his travels is also a recognition of the problem which Shelley faced in his own life. We have referred to the lack of any sympathy on his father's part which was repeated by other people with whom he came in contact--in his school days we recall that only Dr. Lind gave him encouragement; at Oxford the professors had early turned their backs upon Shelley; his sole companion during these and the next several years was Jefferson Hogg, who so sadly misused the confidence Shelley placed in him. In Italy, also, the circle of close friends was small. Wylie herself, as we have seen, found little in her milieu to satisfy her need for sympathetic intercommunication; in Shiloh's sudden dash for escape from the artificial excitement of Rosalie's wedding, we find symbolic reference to the same type of unreasoning fear and need

for escape which motivated Wylie's flight from Philip Richborn.

There were, in addition to David, some few spirits who could grasp Shiloh's significance. Representative of these is Captain Ffoulkestle. To Shiloh he says:--

> "'I know you're a good boy....; you're brave as a lion in the face of danger, and you've a soft heart for any sort of trouble among your mates.... But you're inclined to be hot-headed and what the schoolmasters call idealistic, and that never did nobody no good.'" (Page 362)

In Monsieur Saint-Ange, the gently sceptical sybarite with his delicate wines, his volume of Sainte-beuve, and his brocaded dressing gown, Shiloh finds a reflection of his own love of beauty and delight in scholarship. In Captain Appleby, a delightful blend of the hard-headed man of action and the whimsical and disappointed dreamer, Shiloh finds another understanding companion. These men are few in number, however, and Shiloh, as did Shelley, finds his greatest pleasure in solitary study, or the unhampered freedom offered him in his travels with David.

We have seen that Shiloh as a romantic felt that it was the arbitrary laws and confinements of a gross civilization which bound the individual soul. His quest for ideal liberty proceeds, then, to the Indian territory. Here surely he will find those "noble savages" among whom life is lived freely

and richly. The early pioneers had proven to be rough and uncouth, and had offended Shiloh's exquisite sensibilities: the Indians prove--even the most friendly of them--to be sadly lacking in a perception of the value and dignity of a human life. The Indian episode is, on the whole, over-drawn, but it does symbolize and dispel the futile romantic notion of the "noble savage." Its focal point is in Anne, the Puritan maid, captured as a child and raised to the rank of Princess of the tribe. Anne's innocent offer to bring Shiloh the head of his attacker symbolizes the final disenchantment. The title of the book which deals with the Indian adventures, The Unpastured Dragon, is a symbolic condensation of the ugliness and brutality which lie below the surface in humankind; Shiloh realizes that it is this fact which necessitates the laws and conventions against which he has militated in his demand for complete freedom.

But the final awakening of Shiloh to his place in the everyday world is yet to come. Eventually the long trip is over and Shiloh presents himself to Don Narciso de Coronel, Silver's uncle. The latter is the symbol which crystallizes for Shiloh the dreadful results of the selfish gratification of one's personal desires. Don Narciso is "devoid of nobility....;" he was so wickedly eager to be rid of Sylvie and so cynically glad of Shiloh as her seducer that Shiloh shuddered in revolt against the base appeal." And again:--

"The face of Don Narciso de Coronel became

> bright with a wicked glittering brightness; his eyes were infernal diamonds for cutting the crystal of another's soul." (Page 527)

To reject Sylvie, Don Narciso tells Shiloh, is to reject himself:--

> "You have rejected yourself; you have rejected your desires, and your luminous dreaming mind; you have rejected your own soul." (Page 528)

But Shiloh suddenly strikes back with the answer that the plea is "blackening the moonlight and kindling an infernal planet in the nethermost pit to enchant me." The mere satisfaction of his lover's instincts will not bring "the peace of heaven" and "with the power of (his) own will" Shiloh refuses Don Narciso's temptations.

> "'Very well,' replied Don Narciso... 'You have beaten me...; you have held your own on ground that is mine.... Goodbye, and may God be with you if you care for his company.'
> 'Who in heaven's name are you?' asked Shiloh with a shiver in his voice.
> 'You are perfectly aware who I am,.... Mine was an old name in heaven, and one that you have always admired.'" (Page 528)

Here in this symbolic passage, Wylie clearly reveals the danger of the pure romantic. The <u>old name</u> is Lucifer, symbol of fearless pride and independence which Shelley, like that stern Puritan, Milton, had long admired. The <u>glittering, diamond eyes</u> evokes a memory of the eternal serpent who is forever undermining man's innocence and goodness. Allied with this is the suggestive name of Don Narciso with its symbolic reference to an ingrown self-adoration. Through this accumulative symbol, Wylie reveals her comprehension

of the ease with which prideful individualism may go over into mere sensuous and amoral satisfaction of one's personal desires. Shiloh's rejection of such undisciplined liberty indicates his final mastery over himself, and the beginning of a better understanding of the responsibilities freedom imposes upon the individual.

This clarification is further developed in the following symbolic excerpt which finds Shiloh alone after he has sent David to claim Silver:--

> "as the sun rose over the mountains he turned his head to watch it and took the flood of brightness into his eyes without blinking. It was as if a bitter golden balm had washed his eyes and brow...." (Page 633)

The bitter golden balm is the intelligent acceptance of the individual's responsibility; it is the practical realization that the world is not yet ready for full and untrammeled liberty of self-expression. And it, too, is closely related to the development of Shelley into a man of sound and mature judgements which we find in his last years in Italy. Many were the difficulties, financial, family, and personal, which Shelley had to face, and he faced them with courage, with ability, and with a persistent energy remarkable in the face of the opposition he met. Wylie, too, finds that she has to make a practical and sensible solution to her difficulty; this she does in her refusal to break up the pattern of her life and that of the gentleman of the <u>One Person</u> cycle. Wylie's growth in maturity and wisdom is clearly to be seen

in the greater tolerance and humanity in her last volume of verse.

The final solution is, of course, the realization that the only possible answer to the aesthetic idealist's personal dilemna, his need for the preservation of his individuality, is artistic creation. Through his art, the spirit of the idealist will continue to raise up man's state. This realization Shiloh had foreseen earlier when, his eyes alight with "the brightness of a fawn's" and "something of the panther in his air of pride," had had cried, "I go on until I am stopped, and I am never stopped."

> "So speaking,..., Shiloh passed...., and all who beheld him marvelled at his beauty and the singular triumph plain upon his brow. Some thought him mad, but few forbore to love him, and into the hearts of several his image entered that morning to remain always, the bright wound of an arrow pointed by a star."
> (Page 369)

The spirit of Shelley has indeed gone on--his poetry has carried on the high purpose to which he dedicated it in his <u>Defence of Poetry</u>, when he wrote that poetry was above all to awaken man to a consciousness of his own power for good. This decision of Shiloh's, his recognition that his happiness lay in the creation of art which would so stimulate a developing moral consciousness of man, reflects the mature philosophic perspective of Shelley. Thus has Wylie pursued her "symbolic romance of the mind" of Shelley (and, indirectly, of Wylie herself) through from the groping and

confused, essentially selfish, idealism of the young Shelley to the wiser and more tolerant philosophy of his later years.

There are many more incidents, symbolic passages, and comments which present the picture of the progress of Shiloh more fully than we have been able to trace. The study, with its many-sided interests, was an interesting and complex one--it is this profusion of themes which Wylie attempted to carry through in parallel development that vitiates against the best possible presentation of her main interest. The reader is sometimes confused as to her purpose--there is, however, always a consciousness in the reader's mind that Wylie is writing out of a very great knowledge of the actual life of Shelley, and that she has succeeded in presenting a fully rounded portrait of her favorite literary personality. In this respect, the book is an artistic success; its limitations arise from the magnitude of the task which Wylie set herself.

Mr. Hodge and Mr. Hazard

With this last of her four novels, Wylie reasserts the power she had shown in The Venetian Glass Nephew. The novel she refers to in her Advertisement as "a brief symbolic romance of the mind." It relates the perilous adventures of the idealistic literary mind in a world which is inimical to it, and against which the artist has, for his only bulwark, the tensely drawn, self-forged armour of his pride. Wylie states that the reader is to regard the central character as "a composite miniature of the whole generation of the romantics in the early nineteenth century."[1] It is not another incarnation of Shelley, as Mr. Cabell writes,[2] nor is it, as Virginia Moore claims, a portrait of Wylie herself.[3] The trappings of Hazard are drawn from Wylie's amazing knowledge of the Romantic Period as a whole, and if there are many references that must be related to Shelley alone, it is only because Wylie had long considered him as the outstanding figure of the period. Hazard is not, however, akin to the realized portrait of Shelley which Wylie presented in The Orphan Angel--of Shiloh only the essential ghost remains, and that the ghost of his or any other writers' aesthetic imagination.

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1. Wylie, Elinor: Collected Prose; Page 647
2. Sanctuary in Porcelain: Virginia Quarterly Review, July, 1930
3. Innocence Abroad: Page 172

Isobel Patterson writes in her preface to the story of Hodge and Hazard that it concerns England in "the absence of Shelley."[1] It is indeed, England in the absence of the burning heart of the romantic idealist. And an amazing picture is presented lightly and satirically of an England where people "were changing houses and opinions;" where "everyone was sedulous and earnest;" where Mr. Wordsworth "was worried about the realm, but delighted with his first grandchild" and "would not stop composing Evening Voluntaries." It is the England where Mr. Hartleigh--undoubtedly the older, shabby, gentle, and ineffectual Leigh Hunt--was offering sincere and unimaginative advice to Hazard, while his wife, Annamaria, worried about blankets and cod-liver oil for the luckless adventurer; where the younger Hartleighs gone to a little party with "the country cousin at the pianoforte and custards for supper" are the first Victorians. Such an England plainly has little or no room and less understanding for the impractical visionary which Hazard represents.

Many symbolic passages reveal the traits of Hazard. There is the trifling incident of the tea:--

> "It was his lifelong habit to pour the tea out when it was still too weak, and this from a natural impatience; an equally natural absence of mind prevented him from drinking any of it until he had read another chapter or written another stanza." (Page 652)

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1. Wylie, Elinor: Collected Prose, Page 639

Hazard had indeed a natural genius for "making himself uncomfortable" not only physically, but mentally and spiritually as well. And when Annamaria finds that Hazard has caught influenza, "an Italian fever," and says:--

> "I wish we could find a bed for you here, Hazard, but there are the children to be considered. They mustn't catch it from you, you know,...." (Page 661)

Hazard realizes that it is more than influenza that Annamaria is sheltering her children from:--

> "Mr. Hazard heard her words quite plainly, but at first they conveyed nothing to his truly remarkable intelligence save an impression that he was again in Greece and that someone had shot at him....from behind a silver-plated tea-urn. But in Greece the ambush had been a clump of flowering laurel...and only a stinging score of pellets had lodged in his shoulder and in the thin arm thrown so instinctively over the clear discerning eyes which had seen the smoke.... rising above the laurel.... Stupid of him not to have seen the white prophetic cloud above the tea-urn!" (Page 661)

Thus the influenza becomes the outward sign for all the past follies and weaknesses that make the Romantic dangerous to the well-being of reasonable folk--the <u>pellets</u> and <u>ambush</u> are those attacks that continually follow the action, even the mere being, of the romantic idealist. This is the realization which burns into Hazard's soul and heightens the suffering which he experiences. Confused fancies and doubts torture him:--

> "The Hartleigh children were not like flowers; it was not fair that they should die. And what of those other children...; were they not each like a flower or a bird, and was it not

his fault that they were lead? Or was it, perhaps, the fault of the Lord Chancellor?" (Page 664)

"Annamaria had known quite well that he was the enemy of children; that he cast a blight upon them...." (Page 664)

Hazard remembers Herod, and then "knew that he was not really Herod" but only that he was tired and ill and that the effect upon him of this Ambush at a Breakfast Table--and of all other such assaults--was to bring about the drying up of his literary and idealistic impulses;--

"The exaltation, the mercurial elegance, the valour, and the strong vivacity were shrivelled up...until they rattled in his head like scorching peas and fled along his veins like rusty needles. He was in pain, but whether of the body or the soul his fever could not tell." (Page 664)

Against the intermittent blasts of the fever, which lasted from January to May, Mr. Hazard wove his armour of flexible mail, "a knitting up of nerves into invulnerable proof." This was to be his shelter from all fevers, whether of influenza or "other fevers, called by the names of living tongues and the dead tongues of antiquity" which "had already tried their teeth upon him...."

"People had been very kind, he supposed; to a herd-neglected deer even perfunctory attentions might have appeared a solace. But to a wolf, or mad dog such trifles were no more than a whistling of stones and a clattering of rusty tins at hunted heels." (Page 674)

The visions of himself as a wolf, mad dog, or as the murderous Herod, are merely the reflections in Hazard's fevered

intelligence of the misunderstanding and scorn he has met in his adventurings in London. Wylie thus exposes the super-sensitivity which is at once the blessing and the curse of the artist. Hazard is unable to endure even the gentle administrations of Hartleigh; he flees from the attentions of the doctor which Hartleigh has sent him; the well-meaning attempts of Robert Browning to help him in his sickness meet with determined opposition. The hapless ghost can no more bear pity than hatred--and Hazard flees with the coming of spring to Gravelow. Here he determines "to mind his own affairs;" the world and its destinies can survive without him. And yet Wylie says:--

> "A hundred fitful and intemperate schemes had flourished and died down within the past twenty years, whose fruits were to benefit the race of man from Niagara to Propontis, so many exotics sprung from the fertile soil of Mr. Hazard's brain." (Page 680)

That was the Romantic in the early flush of his vigour; now, tired and embittered, seeing the apparent scorn in the eyes of those whom he met, Hazard foregoes the splendid visions of his youth and takes refuge in extreme self-pity. He refuses to "set his thin shoulder to some useful revolution of a wheel in a machine"--indeed, that is the weakness of the Romantic; he lacks the hard core of self-discipline which would enable him to push on to the final working out of his beautiful dreams for humanity. And this, too, is realized by the bothersome intelligence of Hazard:--

> "Some devil had sown tares in the garden he had sought to plant in this green valley, but his impatience had despaired too soon; he had let an army of wretched weeds drive him out of his inheritance. He had been infantile in his swift despair; he had never lacked courage, but he had lacked fidelity and that careless trust in his own powers which is worth more...than.... the approval of publics." (Page 689)

Inrodinately brilliant, sensitive, idealistic, and courageous, the Hazards of the world, lacking the power of self-discipline, are a "prey to morbid introspection" and so their gifts fall before the disapproval of more limited individuals and they fail to find a proper consummation of their talents.

London has offered him no peace, nor refuge, where Hazard can feel secure, and from its harshness he flees:--

> "his released soul sped like an arrow to a mark which his own mind had that instant traced upon the future. He had not the least doubt of the veracity of this vision. He did not know that his own mind, unreasonably swift and impetuous, had fled away in front of his wishes and struck the fountain of light from the blank rocky wall of the future. But he saw the light in the distance much more plainly than the dim brassy number above Mrs. Downing's door." (Page 685)

That, too, is the Romantic's way. From past disappointment, from the dead present, they can always speed onward in the sureness "of a baseless hope" to certain happiness and achievement in the future.

Once established at Gravelow, Hazard sets about to finish his monumental drama of Job; "he felt that his own experiences had fitted him with acquired talents for the task." From Job, it was easy enough to slip for pleasure

into a re-reading of Milton's Paradise Lost. "Twenty years of reading him had given Mr. Hazard Satan by heart; sometimes he regarded him as a beloved friend, but more often he identified the fallen angel with himself." It was in this spirit, symbolized by his self-pitying identification of himself with the beseiged Job and the proud Satan, that Hazard sought to find his peace and to "plant his orchards" once more in the green valley of England.

He was not to go without charming company, however, and it is not long before the silver arrow, in the form of Allegra, has pierced Hazard. It was another vain dream; Hazard falls hopelessly and foolishly in love with Allegra who "slipped, like a molten crystal, into some mould which his imagination had prepared since childhood." Allegra is the symbol of the beauty in pure and integral form that Hazard had searched for during all his life. She is clear, cold, having "the hard heart of a child" and lacking in the softer humanity of her sister Rosa.

> "Nevertheless she (Allegra) was courteous and not unkind; there was no shadow of cruelty to mar her pure impersonal laughter. Her nonchalance could neither inflict a hurt nor heal it; she was innocent of the desire to wound and innocent of pity." (Page 726)

Hazard, "happiest in gentle presences," nevertheless chose the "silver rather than the gold,....the sharp flower of the snow-flake rather than the tender flower of the earth." And again:--

Hazard was happy--

> "to gaze into the clear, sharply faceted crystal of Allegra's face and to see therein the tragic past and the tired present and the austere future, melted into a single beam of light." (Page 699)

Allegra is, then, that beam of light shining in the dark weariness of Hazard's stay in London--the vain hope which he was ever to pursue.

It is Lady Clara Hunting, mother of Allegra and Rosa, who provides Hazard with the cool and detached kindness his soul craved.

> "Mr. Hazard watched her unhurried smooth approach with sentiments of pleasure; her gliding step, her gown of thin blue muslin, even the tinted cameo at her throat, seemed emblematical of peace. Mr. Hazard trusted such a lady to be kind as he would have trusted a cluster of white grapes to be sweet or a moss rose to be fragrant." (Page 701)

Lady Clara is the daughter of Lord Camphile, erstwhile Gerald Poynyard of the East India Company, and of the beautiful and gracious Augusta. Wylie says of Clara:--

> "Although Clara was cast in a porcelain mould, she was both liberal and humane. Her mind was temperate and well-bred; the sentimental and the intolerant were alike ludicrous to her sight. She was the calm sophisticated foe of cruelties and oppressions;..." (Page 736)

But Lady Clara did not fully comprehend the depths and shades in Hazard:--

> "Her quick intelligence,...her perceptive sympathies, which rarely involved her heart, her experience, which swept lightly over humanity,....these qualities enabled her to look into the depths of Mr. Hazard's mind with

> a gracious ceremonial smile... The eccentric little that she saw affected her with a moderate pang of pity; her intuition was limited, but fair and lenient." (Page 703)

It was her intuition which made her see Hazard as "only another black sheep; the thorns and briers of the reasonable world were tagged with locks of visionary wool from the fleece of such poor creatures." The symbolic elements of these quotations (and of those which concern Allegra), such as the <u>porcelain mould</u>, the characteristic impersonal detachment of the mother and daughter, recall to our mind the tragic inadequacy of Rosalba after she had emerged from the furnace at Sevres. Rosalba, Lady Clara, and Allegra, are various shades and degrees of partial and incomplete personalities, since in none of them is the full depth of emotional experience which alone is the proving ground and source of genuinely vital living.

During the next three month, Hazard lives in peace of mind, working on his drama, escaping in the evenings to Milton's <u>Paradise Lost</u>, and once or twice a week going to Lyonnesse where the Huntings made him welcome and comfortable for an afternoon or evening. The unreality of this idyllic existence is indicated by many symbolic elements: it was a life of "strawberry and cream," of "Butter and Honey;" it was a middle state between sleeping and waking:--

> "He (Hazard) moved in an elegiac atmosphere; he was secluded and absolved from all extremities

> of the heart, and his mind had forbidden himself to grieve or to provoke him... The present closed upon him like a hermit's cell..." (Page 719)

It was Clara who soothed his soul to patience and unravelled the "horrid knots" of his thoughts into order and tranquility; it was she too, who refused to recognize what Hazard himself did not then suspect--the fact of his tragic and unequal love for Allegra:--

> "The emotion that he now experienced was love; Mr. Hazard was too proud, too scrupulous and too sensitive to recognize the recurrent spell... he believed that he was so far insensible and disillusioned as to be safely guarded against the assaults of love." (Page 715)

> "Clara's verbal skill and Mr. Hazard's thin-skinned and fastidious taste were united in an effort to invalidate the fact of Hazard's.... love." (Page 710)

But the tranquil sequence is not to endure; the chapter title, <u>The Wasp in the Jam</u>, heralds the approach of Mr. Hodge. Mr. Hodge, the <u>wasp</u>, is the former secretary of Gerald's last years; he is now the tutor of Clara's two sons. Hodge, unfortunately, possesses many of Gerald's traits; he is habitually "discourteous to the world" and "crushed the timid and the vain in his invincible progress towards success." He is the harsh realist and materialist, member of the rising class of successful and insensitive practical men of affairs. Against his arrogance, the fiery assaults of the visionary will be blunted, and, one suspects, he will even-

tually succeed in snatching the porcelain Lady Clara by the sheer force of persistent power.

It is the kindness of Rosa who brings about The Crack of Doom. Like the earlier Ambush at a Breakfast Table, doom descends unexpectedly and with doubled force upon Hazard. Rosa, attempting to bring Hazard into the conversation which has been dominated by Hodge, asks the former whether he has finished his sonnet to Milton. In the brief silence which follows the question, Hodge says:--

> "'Poor Milton,' said Mr. Hodge in his heavy mysterious voice, which was yet plain enough for his meaning."

> "Mr. Hazard recognized the crack of doom.... He was startled as he had been startled at the Hartleigh's breakfast table...; the crystal instant was shattered,...." (Page 740)

> "He (Hazard) translated Mr. Hodge's two words with accurate skill; they informed him he was an appalling person, unfit to associate with the innocent and the noble, that his appearance was odd, his principles outrageous, and his opinions contemptible." (Page 742)

The crystal shattered, Hazard's mind, lulled by the peace of Gravelow, rises again to torment him:--

> "Mr. Hodge had unlocked the prison and let loose the demoniacal mind, and now it sped, through the high chambers of the soul, breaking the looking glass walls with the vibrations of its laughter." (Page 751)

The brittle, mocking laughter of Hazard's elegant mind asserts its power over the "Poor angel" of his soul, now dragging its tattered wings in the dust of reality. Mr. Hodge has won; Hazard is chased from his Eden at Gravelow. To Lady Clara

Hazard sends as his parting gift, a little intaglio, "a blond and frosted moonstone, bearing upon its surface the figures of a lion and a stag. The lion's teeth were sunk in the stag's flying shoulder."

There is the image, the symbol, of Hazard's luckless career. The stag, or poet, fleeing always before the grasp of the Hodges, too slight and vulnerable to wage equal contest with the harder realists of the world.

In the last clarity of his painful awakening, Hazard realizes that his love for Allegra (to which Hodge has awakened him) has fled; it was Lady Clara he loved for her kindness and because "she had kept his pride inviolate and saved his face."

> "Mr. Hazard remembered Clara, and a pang of intense desire cut his heart in two. He longed for the woman in ten thousand idle ways, which being added together and summed up, became a crying hunger, an instinctive need, an immediate infantile wailing within the spirit."

This love, it should be noted, is composed mainly of the desire for protection; Lady Clara with her porcelain and detached kindness had become the symbol for peace and refuge.

Thus the portrait of the romantic is drawn: it reflects Wylie's Puritan dislike of undisciplined looseness of character. Her Hazard is intelligent, imaginative, emotional, and above all, proud. But his is a pride that makes him unable to adjust himself to reality; it is a pride without the integrity of purposeful and unselfish action; a pride

not implemented with a persisting will-to-do. With his mind, Hazard realizes his failings; he knows himself to be the bitter and mocking slave of his own weaknesses, and he remains a slave to the weaknesses that are the result of emotional immaturity. It is this latter instability that leads to his inefficiency to meet the every-day demands of reality--again Wylie thus reveals her own personal problem which never reached a satisfactory solution in her practical life.

Even so, at his best, the Romantic can pierce through the shades of the world into a clear realization of the meaning of experience. Such a realization comes to Hazard in the final moments of the novel; it is a realization of the "five points in a star" which are necessary for a total life experience. Four were represented in the room: Hilary--the solemn and thoughtful approach to life; Tristram--the volatile, quickly darting vitality and zest for life; Hodge--symbol of a practical adaptation to reality; and Hazard--symbol of the imaginative, poetic approach to life. The fifth, "which set a crown upon the whole and was superior to the others and remained a part of heaven" is the acknowledgement of the need for faith, for a spiritual awareness of meaning in life . Here Wylie most clearly shows her alliance with the Transcendental school. It is not enough to be practical, to be serious and thoughtful, to be vitally active, nor to dream dreams: one must unite these powers, or these approaches to life with the guiding hand of spiritual values.

Only when this is so, only when all the native faculties of man are thus fused within a harmonic personality, can all manner of experience--mental, emotional, physical--become ordered and blended into a coherent whole.

In this clearest expression of Wylie's personal creed--which, however, she was never able consistently or more than partially to achieve in her practical life--we find an indication of the total purpose of all four novels. All, we realize, have tended toward a clarification of this problem of the relationship of the individual with his environment. The four novels are thus interrelated and constitute a single exploration into the workings of the individual upon his environment, and, conversely, the effect of his environment upon the individual, toward a clarification of the possible beauty and significance of life.

Chapter V

THE SYMBOLIC POETRY OF ELINOR WYLIE

It is in her poetry that Wylie found the highest expression of her genius. It was through her poetry that she was best able to express cleanly, surely, and with a rare combination of passion and wit, the perplexities, the doubts and griefs of her life; it was through poetry, too, that her courage and independence of mind found its most exultant voice. In her novels, it is Wylie's intellect which is primarily at work, embroidering upon her brilliant tapestries the symbolic characters whose failings and greatnesses alike reflect her understanding of the poverty of the usual social existence, and the latent possibilities for a full, rich, and vital living. But it is essentially her wit--a modern counterpart of that intellectual ardor which fired Blake and Donne--and not her passion, which makes the novels glow. Such predominance of mind over emotion is not, in general, incompatible with the purpose of the novel form; it is certainly inherent in the very nature and purpose of Wylie's chosen themes. Therefore it is, and rightly so, in her poetry that Wylie's emotional power lies closest to the surface.

This is not to say that Wylie always achieves in her poetry great emotional intensity; but it is to claim for Wylie a steady progression from the purely intellectual

quality of many of her early poems, to that splendor of passion revealed in her last volume. It was not that Wylie, in her first volume, Nets to Catch the Wind, was lacking in technical mastery; it has been truly said that for style and finish Wylie had few equals and no peers. But we are too often aware of the perfection of the expression, and of the too facile keenness and wit--the result of a determined repression of her emotional compulsions and of a consequent over-balance of surface skill and intellect. Progressively, however, Wylie released in her poetry, the strong emotional drives which she had barred so rigidly in her early life; progressively, Wylie became warmer, more human, more passionate both in her life and in her art, until in her final volume, Angels and Earthly Creatures, she was able to make the proper balance between mind and emotion. Such passion as we find in her early poetry centers about her desire to be strong and brave; to be completely free and independent; to be self-sufficient and proud in her integrity; to "live like the eagle;" to "Avoid the lathered pack" and the "steaming sheep." Such are the ardors of the metaphysicists--and it is in these early poems that her kinship to Messrs. Donne and Blake is most apparent; but such ardors remain, for the run of mankind, cold and austere. With the greater wisdom of her later years, however, we find her writing of herself in relation with other people; we find her exulting, at once fiercely and humbly, in a love so powerful that she could

write:--

> "I hereby swear that to uphold your house
> I would lay my bones in quick destroying lime
> Or turn my flesh to timber for all time;
> Cut down my womanhood; lop off the boughs
> Of that perpetual ecstasy that grows
> From the heart's core;.....
> .....
> My lord, adjudge my strength, and set me where
> I bear a little more than I can bear."
> (One Person: No. XVI)

She could write with her newly found happiness and wisdom:--

> "Reason's a rabbit in a hutch,
> And ecstasy's a were-wolf ghost;
> But, C, beware the nothing-much
> And welcome madness and the most."
> (Nonsense Rhyme)

Such poems as the tender "As I Went Down by Havre de Grace...;" "The Coast Guard's Cottage" with its dramatic power; Love Song, in which the poet sings "To love I have been candid, Honest and open-handed."; or the Lament for Glaucerion, in which the widow says, "The vanishing dust of my heart is proud, To watch me wither and grow old," that she might the sooner join her beloved "ghost below the ground,"--these are not the writings of a woman cold and austere of heart, but the utterances of a woman of deeply stirred passions whose art could catch and mould them in matchless expression. It is that sonnet cycle, One Person, which reveals Wylie as capable of a high, sustained eloquence; her art matured, her heart newly torn with wonder and passion, she reaches in these sonnets a vital warmth and depth of emotion unequalled in our time.

But even in those poems in which passion gains its most open expression, Wylie does not negate her central conviction of the harmonic personality; that philosophic perspective we saw emerging in her novels, finds in her poetry a more intense, because a more clearly personal and intimate, revelation. Always it is the individual realization achieved through the effort of the aesthetic imagination, aided by the light of the intellect and the fire of the emotions, of the significant and meaningful relations between object and idea, between body and mind, between man and nature, between man and man, that Wylie seeks to express. It is her own experience she searches; it is through the significance of these moments "snatched from the flux of time" that Wylie finds at the last, the unseen--God, the human spirit and purpose--behind the seen, or the experienced fact. This relationship Wylie revealed through her symbols, for she strove always to find the appropriate symbol which would serve as the embodiment of her intellective, emotional, and intuitive realizations.

The wealth of symbolism in Elinor Wylie's poetry makes an exhaustive study impossible within the confines of this paper, for it is a rare poem of Wylie's that does not contain at least a hint of symbolic overtones, and there are many which are completely dependent upon the symbolic interpretation for their meaning. To aid our study of the use of the symbol, we have chosen some twenty poems over the complete

range of Wylie's collected poetry. Since our study is of the symbol and its use, we shall not undertake any analysis of the technique, the diction, metre, or music of the poems, save as these have an especial functional symbolic meaning. In a sense, her technique as a whole may be said to have symbolic significance, reflecting as it does, in Wylie's choice of the clean, precise, sculptured line and diction, the classical precision and clarity of her artistic and philosophic perspective.

We have said that Wylie drew upon all sources for her symbols: she used the traditional literary, the Biblical, the mythological, and the wide resources of flower, gem, and animal symbolism, as well as creating symbols from out of her own experience and environment. We shall attempt some organization of the poems as illustrative of a particular class of symbols. However, the admixture of many types within one poem makes such an organization difficult save in the selection of poems having a preponderance, rather than an exclusive use, of a particular type of symbol. Through a fairly detailed study of these chosen poems, we shall show in what way the symbol with its condensation of emotional implications and overtones, lends a richness of meaning that non-symbolic expression must take a longer route to encompass.

Madman's Song

Better to see your cheek grown hollow,
Better to see your temple worn,
Than to forget to follow, follow,
After the sound of a silver horn.

Better to bind your brow with willow
And follow, follow until you die,
Than to sleep with your head on a golden pillow
Nor lift it up when the hunt goes by.

Better to see your cheek grown sallow
And your hair grown gray, so soon, so soon,
Than to forget to hallo, hallo
After the milk-white hounds of the moon.

What has been referred to as a "lovely lyric" becomes, on a study of the symbolism, the expression of Wylie's artistic creed. The emotional appeal of sound and rhythm, coupled with those overtones of meaning related to the original symbols, unite here to give the reader an understanding of her strict integrity in whatever concerned her artistic perspective and her innate being.

The Madman is, of course, Wylie herself. It is not of herself as an individual that she is writing, however, but of herself as an artist who voluntarily chooses the harder road in order to satisfy her creative needs. Within the poem are several important symbols: there is, first, the silver horn--a literary symbol fixed in our language and awakening in our minds the ideal quest of a Childe Harold, with the courage and valor of a Roland. With these two elements of idealism and courage are fused, in the second symbol, willow, the suggestion of sorrow and pain consequent upon the choice of the life voluntarily chosen by the Madman.

Golden Pillow is a created symbol of the life of ease and luxury which Wylie repudiated in her own "quest" for the satisfaction of her urge to create. That this ideal quest is the quest of the poetic imagination for expression is made certain by the final phrase, Milk-White Hounds of the Moon, in which the poet's hunt is allied with the traditional use of moon as a symbol of the poetic imagination. Milk-White reinforces the idealism of the quest, as does hounds with its association with religious zeal and devotion. The title, also, has a further satiric and symbolic meaning; chosen as the name for the poet, it reflects the too usual worldly attitude toward the idealist and dreamer in whatever sphere of life.

The technique, with its far-away, haunting musicality, echoes the spirit of the poet's total realization, setting as it does the mood in which the selected literary symbols gain a further effectiveness. To Wylie's own experience, then, are added the many ideas, the many emotional attitudes, which these symbols arouse--both in their original usage and in this present context--in the perceptive reader. We find, consequently, an extension of meaning which goes beyond one individual's limited experience and takes in the courage and faith of any idealist.

Similar to the technique of Madman's Song is the technique used in Incantation, which may seem at first reading

to be no more than an effective study of contrasts in black and white.

Incantation

A white well
In a black cave;
A bright shell
In a dark wave.

A white rose
Black brambles hood;
Smooth bright snows
In a dark wood.

A flung white glove
In a dark fight;
A white dove
On a wild black night.

A white door
In a dark lane;
A bright core
To bitter black pain.

A white hand
waved from dark walls;
In a burnt black land
Bright waterfalls.

A bright spark
where black ashes are
In the smothering dark
One white star.

Here the poet carries us through from the suggestion of mystic wonder in the white well; the saving glimpses of natural beauty in life in bright shell, bright snows, and bright waterfalls in a land otherwise devoid of softness and loveliness; the suggestion of spiritual love in the traditional symbol white rose; of human love and faith in white glove; the realization of peace and refuge in white dove and white door; the conviction of passionate rightness in bright core; of continuing courage in bright spark where all seems dead; and, finally, to the symbol of a sustaining faith and idealism in One white star which persists in the smothering dark of a tragic, disordered life. Those phrases, such as dark fight, black ashes, and bitter black pain, which are placed in opposition to the symbols of compensatory beauty and hope, symbolize the harshness and confusion that surrounds

the individual as he proceeds through life. The poetic diction, alternating between the harsh, flat sound of wild black night, bitter black pain, and the higher and smoother tonality of white rose, and smooth bright snows, reflects the contrasts in color and the contrasts in the emotional reactions of the individual in the face of the opposing forces, beauty and ugliness, in life.

Wylie here alternates between symbols chosen from the natural environment of the individual--the bright shell, the bright snows--and symbols which have a medieval flavor and origin, such as the flung white glove, or the white well. It is the last symbol of the star that points the significance of the preceding symbols; it contains within itself the poet's intention to reveal the ever-present hope in life for a greater beauty and greater accomplishment no matter how disturbed and barren the world may sometimes appear.

The following poem, Pegasus Lost, does not appear in Wylie's Collected Poetry. It first appeared in the small volume, Incidental Numbers, published in 1912. The poem was written when Wylie was seventeen years old, and has been chosen for its interest, both in foreshadowing her later symbolic method and in establishing at that early age, her desire to create. The poem now appears in the collection, Modern American Poetry, edited by Louis Untermeyer.

Pegasus Lost

"And there I found a gray and ancient ass,
With dull glazed stare, and stubborn wrinkled smile,
Sardonic, mocking my wide-eyed amaze.
A clumsy hulking form in that white place
At odds with the small stable, cleanly, Greek,
The marble manger and the golden oats.
With loathing hands I felt the ass's side,
Solidly real and hairy to the touch.
Then knew I that I dreamed not, but saw truth;
And knowing, wished I still might hope I dreamed.
The door stood wide, I went into the air.
The day was blue and filled with rushing wind,
A day to ride high in the heavens and taste
The glory of the gods who tread the stars.
Up in the mighty purity I saw
A flashing shape that gladly sprang aloft--
My little Pegasas, like a far white bird
Seeking sun-regions, never to return.
Silently then I turned my steps about,
Entered the stable, saddled the slow ass;
Then on its back I journeyed dustily
Between the sun-wilted hedgerows into town.

Pegasus is that winged horse of Greek legend, a blow from whose hoofs caused the fountain of inspiration, Hippocrene, to flow from the mountain Helicon. It serves Wylie here as a symbol of poetic inspiration, and in a wider sense, as a symbol of youthful idealism which is easily shattered by contact with reality. The gray and ancient ass with its sardonic smile is all that is left of her dreams. Faced with reality, Wylie wishes she "still might hope I dreamed." But the ass is hairy, solidly real to her touch, and her dream routed, she journeys back into town, symbol of the mundane and commonplace actualities of life--in them she thinks to find truth. In her youthful despair, she realizes that only up in the mighty purity of the heavens can her little Pegasus--that far white bird--survive, and that she may not yet

mount that steed to fly with him in the sun-regions. She feels, too, that Pegasus is never to return; her consequent despair is etched by the disparity between the ideal beauty and swiftness of flight in those lines which describe Pegasus and his realm, and the dusty roads, the sun-wilted hedgerows and the slow ass, which is all that she can hope to find on earth. Wylie, later, of course, went far beyond the dusty town and the dull gray ass in her voluntary repudiation of conventional life; she re-found and mounted the Pegasus of her poetic imagination, but only at the cost of personal unhappiness, and only when the fibre of her mind and her spirit were sufficiently hardened to accept the stern demands of her creative needs.

Wylie's later determination to persist in her search for ideal beauty is revealed in the poem Escape, based as ~~it~~ is the preceding poem, on old legends.

Escape

When foxes eat the last gold grape,
And the last white antelope is killed,
I shall stop fighting and escape
Into a little house I'll build.

But first I'll shrink to fairy size,
With a whisper no one understands,
Making blind moons of all your eyes,
And muddy roads of all your hands.

And you may grope for me in vain
In hollows under the mangrove root,
Or where, in apple-scented rain,
The silver wasp-nests hang like fruit.

From the legend of the fox and the grapes, we realize that grapes is a symbol of that which is unattainable; the adjective gold, serves to heighten the beauty and value of this symbol of the unattainable. White antelope, too, is a legendary creature so swift and elusive that it remains ever beyond the reach of man; white emphasizes the quality of purity and perfection of the symbol. These legendary symbols take shape as the ideal objects of the poetic imagination, for it is from the viewpoint of the creative artist that Wylie is writing.

Wylie is saying in effect, Let my dreams, my visions of beauty in life be destroyed, and I, the artist, must vanish into a house of my own devising, away from an unfriendly world. The second stanza contains two brilliant figures--the effect reality will have upon the escaped person--from her place of retreat; the eyes of all the world will become meaningless and vast, dark and dreary as blind moons, and the veinings of the human hand will become muddy roads to her pigmy sight. And she herself, in the last stanza, the essential spirit of the artist, will be fled away and hidden beneath the impenetrable roots of the mangrove, or in the fragile wasp-nests that shatter at a human touch.

The poem reveals the problem that faces any creator of beauty; if his world comes too close to destroying his vision, he will retreat and build his own ideal world. This was, in part, Wylie's way; thus we find created the glittering world

of Rosalba and Virginio, and the enchanted lands of Jennifer and Gerald. But, in her created worlds, it is the human values, the human desires and needs of the spirit, which move within her symbolic characters; it is these needs of the total human personality which provide the bridge from the world fashioned by Wylie's artistic imagination to the real world of our own present. Through this adaptation of old fables and legends which make the matter of the poem Escape, Wylie reveals her understanding of her own artistic devices, and we gain a clearer insight into Wylie as person and as poet. From her use of ancient materials, she relates her experience to the age-old experience of any creative spirit, and once again escapes the purely personal statement.

Turning from this early poem to one of her later years, we find Wylie concerned again with the problem of the search for beauty. The symbolism is drawn from wide sources; there is animal symbolism, symbolism drawn from nature, and lastly, the symbolic use of the experiences of earlier poets.

Sonnet

You are the faintest freckles on the hide
Of fawns; the hoofprint stamped into the slope
Of slithering glaciers by the antelope;
The silk upon the mushroom's under side
Constricts you, and your eyelashes are wide
In pools uptilted on the hills; you grope
For swings of water twisted to a rope
Over a ledge where amber pebbles glide.

Shelley perceived you on the Caucasus;
Blake prisoned you in glassy grains of sand

And Keats in goblin jars from Samarcand;
Poor Coleridge found you in a poppy-seed;
But you escape the clutching most of us,
Shaped like a ghost, and imminent with speed.

By a series of symbols Wylie reveals the essence of beauty. Fawn, and antelope are animal symbols suggestive in their grace and beauty of the inspiration of the aesthetic imagination. Even these traditional symbols seem too gross to Wylie--only the faintest freckles, and the vanishing hoofprints of of the fawn and antelope are delicate enough to convey her sense of beauty. Indeed the entire poem is composed of the lightest and most fragile elements: the silk on the mushroom's under side; the pools uptilted on the hills; the swings of water over a ledge; these are the symbolic elements in nature in which beauty is to be found. The references to the four romantic poets and to their sources of inspiration complete the poet's realization of the elusiveness of beauty. In the variation from the inspiration to be found on the Caucasus, in goblin jars, in glassy grains of sand, and in the poppy seed, we are led to discover that each creative spirit finds his own sources of inspiration; that for each poet the material and substance of his art will differ. For the most of us, however, beauty remains hidden; our duller sight does not catch the ghost, imminent with speed. Beauty, we discover, is not a definite quality of things; its secret and its charm depend upon the vision of the mind's eye. It is there, ultimately, in the creative imagination, that beauty exists.

These fragile symbols, chosen by Wylie, are akin to the elements from which she fashioned her precise and exquisite art. She has elsewhere recognized the danger of going too far afield from reality in her search for ideal beauty; but when, as is generally the case with Wylie, her symbols are imbued with emotional and intellectual significance and are thus related to reality, she escapes the dangers of preciosity. Such a relationship exists here; for the perceptive reader is led to see that it is in his power to find beauty, if he will open his eyes to the significance and spiritual meaning of the objective elements in his experience.

Wylie wrote many poems which deal with the process of the creative imagination. One such is that poem entitled Nonchalance; we shall treat it here because of its close relationship with the preceding poems.

Nonchalance

This cool and laughing mind, renewed
From covert sources like a spring's
Is potent to translate the mood
Of all distraught and twisted things.

In this clear water shall be cast
Outrageous shapes of steel and gold,
And all their hot and clotted past
Beaded with bubbles silver-cold.

The moving power takes their heat
Into itself, forgetting them;
And warmth in trickles, slow and sweet
Comforts ~~th~~ a fainting lily-stem.

Jung would undoubtedly be interested in the symbolism of this poem. Spring, pools, water in any form, he designates

as an archetype symbol revealing the desire of the individual to meet 'his shadow', or his inner psychic self, which lies below the surface of the conscious mind. Wylie uses the clear water of her intellective faculty as the agent by which the ugly realities of life are to be translated into images of beauty. The source of her power to so translate the mood of twisted things rises, she realizes, from the unconscious levels of her experience--these are the covert sources which renew her mind. The moving power--the creative imagination--takes its material, the outrageous shapes of steel and gold, with their hot and clotted past, from her conscious and worldly experience. Once the artist, through the workings of the subconscious creative processes, perceives the real meaning of these objects and experiences in life, the distortion, the pain, and the ugliness disappear, and they assume the shape of beauty.

In Wylie's conversion of the heat, the gold and steel, characteristic of the objects from her conscious experience, to the gentler warmth, the slow, sweet trickles, and the bubbles silver-cold of the translated objects, is revealed her dislike of too great richness and luxury, and her instinctive bent toward the greater clarity and purity of silver, cool, and colorless things. Such use of color, of her preference for simple and clear things, is frequently to be found in Wylie, and is always a direct expression of the Puritan center of her personality. It reveals too, her revulsion from and her refusal to admit her emotional compul-

sions, the intensity of which might obscure her clear vision and artistic integrity. The limitations of such art is revealed in Wylie's last line--her art can provide warmth and comfort for a fainting lily-stem; more vitality is essential for great art which can inspire humanity.

In True Vine, Wylie further clarifies her understanding of the limitations in an art which is too remote from human experience. Its main symbol, the vine, is a traditional symbol, that re-appears throughout the literature of many ages and epochs.

True Vine

There is a serpent in perfection tarnished,
The thin shell pierced, the purity grown fainter,
The virgin silver shield no longer burnished,
The pearly fruit with ruin for its centre.

The thing that sits expectant in our bosoms
Contriving heaven out of very little
Demands such delicate immaculate blossoms
As no malicious verity makes brittle.

This wild fastidious hope is quick to languish;
Its smooth diaphanous escape is swifter
Than the pack of truth; no mortal can distinguish
Its trace upon the durable hereafter.

Not so the obdurate and savage lovely
Whose roots are set profoundly upon trouble;
This flower grows so fiercely and so bravely
It does not even know that it is noble.

This is the vine to love, whose balsams flourish
Upon a living soil corrupt and faulty,
Whose leaves have drunk the skies, and stooped to nourish
The earth again with honey sweet and salty.

Vine as a literary traditional symbol, represents the individual life; here Wylie uses the symbol to reveal the limi-

tations of the artistic achievement of an individual who has cut himself off from a full experience in life. The first three stanzas deal with her recognition of the danger in her pursuit of perfection, based on the aesthetic-intellectual level of experience. Upon such a level, perfection may be attained, but it is a perfection which is lacking in validity. This recognition is seen by the use of serpent--symbol of cleverness suggestive of evil; by the pearly fruit which has ruin for its centre; by the virgin silver shield, which for want of genuine value loses its pure brightness. The thing that sits expectant in our bosoms is the innate urge of the creative spirit for expression; but to fulfil its demands, there is required an art which the malicious verity of her mocking intelligence can accept as valid and truthful. Such an art must spring from a complete experience in life; lacking such experience, and realizing the insecure foundations of her exquisite art, the artist perceives the falsity of the perfection she has heretofore attained.

The true vine, the genuine art, grows out of contact with the living soil corrupt and faulty. That is the obdurate and savage lovely, the flower that grows so fiercely and so bravely, that it can outlast and overcome all trouble and corruption. The true artist is the one whose art is wrung out of her human experience; she it is who can perceive beauty in the midst of the ugliness and the weakness of the living soil. The last line gains a clearer meaning in rela-

tion to its use, in part, in another poem, Valentine. In this latter poem the poet writes that she will keep pure and untouched her heart; it shall be sealed up in a carven silver cup, In a deep vault. Eventually, however, the poet must eat her heart, Were it bitter gall; honey, wild and sweet, she shall eat, When I eat my heart. In True Vine, written several years later, the workings of her creative imagination clearly reveal the result of this damming up of her heart, and of her instinctive drives. It is the need of a vital emotional center which will give a sustaining vitality to her art, that she is now concerned with; and lacking that center, her perfection is tarnished, her purity grown fainter. True Vine emerges as kindred to Emerson's conception of the true poet--only with the co-operation of the aesthetic, the intellective, and the instinctive, innate emotional elements in man, can genuine worth and value in life or in art be achieved.

A similar theme is the subject of Minotaur, which we shall quote only in part. Its first stanza finds Wylie admonishing herself to:--

> Go study to disdain
> The frail, the over-fine
> Which tapers to a line
> Knotted about the brain.

The Minotaur--a legendary mammoth creature--is the symbol of the instinctive, natural life as against the over-refinement of Aristocratic skulls which:--

Rejected as inept
That innocency kept
'Twixt orbéd eyes of bulls.

It is her intellect which would polish and diminish the brute with pumice and with oil; symbolically, it is her mind which has refused expression to her emotions. This is the reason for an art which is reduced to the sharpened silver nerve, and the lacquered, nacred curve. Her conclusion:--

This only is the cure,
To clasp the creature fast;
The flesh survives at last
Because it is not pure.

From flesh refined to glass
A god goes desert-ward,
Astride a spotted part,
Between an ox and ass.

Let innocence enchant
The flesh to fiercer grain
More fitted to retain
This burning visitant.

Through the use of animal symbolism, this time, Wylie reveals again her fear of the lack of vitality in her art. Her keen intelligence recongizes that it is itself the enemy of her art; the animal symbols, ox, ass, and the spotted pard, are symbols of humility, kindness and loving simplicity--those are elements, arising from a warmth of emotional experience, which Wylie knows to be lacking. Here as in True Vine, perfection is unreal, and non-human; and here too, the poetic imagination, symbolized by A god, flees and goes desert-ward to escape from flesh refined to glass. This last symbolism occurs frequently in Wylie; it is related to her use of the glass Virginio as a symbol of a partitive and incomplete

personality. In the use of Minotaur as a symbol of the natural, instinctive emotional life, we sense again Wylie's fear and distrust of the emotions, and her fear that to surrender to them would mean the utter loss of her individuality. These symbolic confessions of Wylie are an excellent example of her own statements, previously referred to, concerning her use of symbolism. For through the poems, True Vine and Minotaur, Wylie revealed in symbolic art the importance of, and the necessity for the affective elements in life. This is what her conscious mind would not admit, until late in her career.

We have been tending more and more to Wylie's use of animal symbolism. In the next few poems, we shall see examples of her use of animal symbols to express the realization of her poetic spirit, particularly in regard to herself as an individual.

Pity Me

Pity the wolves who prowl unsleeping
  Guarding the pasture from a thief;
Pity the proud leopards weeping
  Tears of subtle grief.

Pity the savage panthers sheathing
  Sharp disdain in silken gloves
Pity the golden lions breathing
  Fire upon their loves.

Pity the prickly star that frightens
  The Christ Child with its shattered spear;
Pity the midnight when it lightens;
  Pity me, my dear.

Allying herself with symbols of those proud and conquering animals, such as the lion, and the panther, Wylie feels within herself the same pride and courage that they have come to symbolize. Sardonically, she refutes pity, grief, and tears, in the startling and ironic images of the wolf Guarding the pasture; the savage panther sheathing his Sharp disdain; the proud leopards weeping. Her proud irony deepens with the command to Pity the prickly star--symbol of the greatest hope and wisdom the world has ever known; or the natural and epic cycle of night and day, in the command to Pity the midnight when it lightens.

The poem presents a clear picture of Wylie's independence, of her integrity, her own pride and courage; it is an intimation, in the last stanza, of the elevated place she gave to her artistic powers. Let the tears and griefs remain for others; she has fashioned herself a strength of spirit that does not need, that even disdains, human sympathy. her Her detachment and aloofness imply the denial of human love and tenderness--this, we know, was the result of her personal tragedies. In the face of the world's scorn or of its proffered sympathy, Wylie retreated into her inviolate individuality. The use of symbolic elements prevents the poem from becoming too personal and thus limited--these symbols belong to the art of the ages, and the poem achieves an impersonal expression that increases its effectiveness.. To Wylie's own proud sufferings are added our emotional reactions to the

symbols she has chosen; consequently the poem has a greater richness of meaning than a poem of a direct, personal statement could have achieved.

A similar expression of Wylie's independent scorn is seen in the poem, A Proud Lady. One of the most personal revelations which Wylie ever wrote, it is, however, no sentimental appeal for pity or tolerance, but a declaration of her own triumph over the world.

A Proud Lady

Hate in the world's hand
Can carve and set its seal
Like the strong blast of sand
Which cuts into steel.

I have seen how the finger of hate
Can mar and mould
Faces burned passionate
And frozen cold.

Sorrowful faces worn
As stone with rain,
Faces writhing with scorn
And sullen with pain.

But you have a proud face
Which the world cannot harm,
You have turned the pain to a grace
And the scorn to a charm.

You have taken the arrows and slings
Which prick and bruise
And fashioned them into wings
For the heels of your shoes.

From the world's hand which tries
To tear you apart
You have stolen the falcon's eyes
And the lion's heart.

What has it done, this world,
With hard finger-tips,
But sweetly chiselled and curled
Your inscrutable lips?

The world's hate, which Like a strong blast of sand, has carved its way into the steel of the individual's defense; which can mar and mould Faces and make them sullen with pain; which can make the individual writhe with scorn--this hatred has met a worthy adversary in Wylie. Its pain, its hate, its scorn, have moulded the fiery spirit that Wylie flaunts proudly. Its arrows and slings have been by her fashioned into wings For the heels of her shoes--symbol of the poetic imagination so swift and keen that it can outsoar and endure above all the attacks of the world.

Finally, from the hatred of the world, Wylie has stolen the falcon's eyes--symbol of the clear vision and strong endurance of the king among birds; she has stolen the lion's heart--symbol of courage that will endure and face down the hatred which surrounds her. Against the scorn she feels, the pain of her suffering has but sweetly chiselled and curled her inscrutable lips. Thus does Wylie reveal that the hardness she found in life, she has taken as a shield for herself; that is the reason for the derisive scorn and the detachment with which she fends off any intrusion from the world upon her innate person. It is the deeply tragic experiences, the recurrent scandals which hounded her, that forced the weaving of this hard surface against the world; these experiences, lying too deep and too painful for overt

expression, could be revealed only through symbolic art. Through this medium, her experience gains in emotive force as the reader traces the progression of Wylie's created and hardly maintained defense against a bitter world.

In another minor lyric, Wylie again uses the symbol of the falcon to express the power and sureness of her poetic spirit.

The Falcon

Why should my sleepy heart be taught
To whistle mocking-bird replies?
This is another bird you've caught,
Soft-feathered, with a falcon's eyes.

The bird Imagination,
That flies so far, that dies so soon;
Her wings are coloured like the sun,
Her breast is coloured like the moon.

Weave her a chain of silver twist,
And a little hood of scarlet wool,
And let her perch upon your wrist,
And tell her she is beautiful.

Here we note the expressive phrase, sleepy heart, which implies that the heart, the affective instincts of Wylie are to be subdued to the need of preserving her remoteness. This bird of the Imagination with its falcon's eyes--the clear vision, as we have seen before, of the artist--is the essential part of Wylie that she keeps free from the frailties of the body. The last stanza reveals the place in life that Wylie thinks she can safely assume--there is no question of meeting with another human being on equal grounds; Wylie

is poet, not woman, and she writes that we are to weave her a chain of silver twist, a little hood of scarlet wool, and let her perch for a moment upon our wrist. The poet needs not, she thinks, find union with another; indeed the merging of her mind and spirit with another's seems to her dangerous and fatal to that inner soul upon which the poetic imagination depends. And once, again, through the use of the symbol, Wylie gives voice to her deepest convictions without lessening the universal significance of the poem. Her understanding and her experience must, however, appear to us to be limited and partial as it is revealed in this poem.

And, in a later poem, Wylie repudiates the idea that woman and poet can be so separated in one individual's experience.

Let No Charitable Hope

Now let no charitable hope
Confuse my mind with images
Of eagle and of antelope:
I am in nature none of these.

I was, being human, born alone;
I am, being woman, hard beset;
I live by squeezing from a stone
The little nourishment I get.

In masks outrageous and austere
The years go by in single file;
But none has merited my fear,
And none has quite escaped my smile.

Eagle is, as we have elsewhere seen, the symbol of the proud and self-sufficient intellect. A similar use of this symbol

occurs in the poem The Eagle and the Mole, where the eagle symbolizes the person who "keeps, above the clouds, his cliff inviolate" and who "sails above the storm" and "stares into the sun;" the person who achieves complete independence of mind over his worldly and material existence. The antelope symbolizes the grace and beauty of the poetic imagination. Her realization that she is neither the eagle--or the pure intellect--nor the antelope--the poetic imagination--alone, is Wylie's admission that more than intellect, more than the poetic imagination, are needed to provide her with a complete experience. The second stanza asserts that she is indeed both human and a woman--and subject to those frailties which all humanity shares in its need for love and sympathy. Stone is an epic and recurrent symbol for the heart which has forsworn its impulses and its needs; it is from her stony heart only that Wylie draws sustenance.

Alone and hard beset as she finds herself to be since she has repulsed her heart, Wylie yet has courage to face the years that go by in single file--a simple revelation of the slow pace of time to the unhappy--and for them all she has the derisive smile of the proud spirit. In the line which concludes the first stanza, I am in nature none of these, Wylie gives open expression to the source of her unhappiness; it has followed her because she has ignored the life-giving and vital meaning which emotional significance lends to life; she has erred, as the transcendental Emerson would say, by failing

to make the proper fusion between body, mind, and spirit.

In the next several poems, we shall see Wylie's ability to make use of the materials from her own environment, for the symbolism of these poems is directly created by her.

The Church-Bell

As I was lying in my bed
I heard the church-bell ring;
Before one solemn word was said
A bird began to sing.

I heard a dog begin to bark
And a bold crowing cock;
The bell, between the cold and dark,
Tolled. It was five o'clock.

The church-bell tolled, and the bird sang,
A clear true voice he had;
The cock crew, and the church-bell rang,
I knew it had gone mad.

A hand reached down from the dark skies,
It took the bell-rope thong,
The bell cried "Look! Lift up your eyes!"
The clapper shook to song.

The iron clapper laughed aloud,
Like clashing wind and wave;
The bell cried out, "Be strong and proud!"
Then, with a shout, "Be brave!"

The rumbling of the market-carts,
The pounding of men's feet
Were drowned in song; "Lift up your hearts!"
The sound was loud and sweet.

Slow and slow the great bell swung,
It hung in the steeple mute;
And people tore its living tongue
Out by the very root.

Wylie uses the ballad stanza with great effectiveness in this revelation of the lack of a vital Christian faith. The church-bell is the symbol of the Christian religion. In an

hour between the cold and dark, the bell tolls, the earth slowly comes alive--the crowing of the cock has, of course, an obvious religious reference, while the singing of the bird and the barking of the dogs, indicates that all nature is aware of the significance of the voice which calls to men. As in a dream, the poet seems to hear the bell gone mad, as if a hand, the hand of Christ, perhaps, reached down to take the bell-rope thong. The poet hears in the mad ringing of the bell, a second attempt to awaken the world to a vital awareness of religious experience. The world of man is deaf to its ringing; the rumbling of the market-carts, the pounding of men's feet, symbolize a world that is earth-bound, narrow, and too preoccupied with its business and material welfare to heed the message of the bell to be strong, proud and brave, or to Lift up ~~their~~ its eyes to see the beauty in spiritual significance. Against the world's indifference, the bell has no power; men make and live Christianity or it dies. The bell swings more and more slowly; it hangs mute in the tower, for man's indifference has torn its living tongue Out by the very root.

In simple and plain language does Wylie reveal how men have stifled the meaning of religion; its power, its vigor, its reality is there for those who trouble to seek it. But for the majority of mankind, religion is not more than an empty husk, a meaningless form and ritual to be endured but not believed; thus the bell hangs mute; although it may still ~~toll the hours of day, it has no meaning and no reality.~~

Sanctuary

This is the bricklayer; hear the thud
Of his heavy load dumped down on stone,
His lustrous bricks are brighter than blood,
His smoking mortar whiter than bone.

Set each sharp-edged, fire-bitten brick
Straight by the plumb-line's shivering length;
Make my marvellous wall so thick
Dead nor living may shake its strength.

Full as a crystal cup with drink
Is my cell with dreams, and quiet, and cool....
Stop, old man! You must leave a chink;
How can I breathe? You can't, you fool!

Again Wylie dreams of retreat from a world grown too harsh; she shall fashion her own cell where the pains and ugliness of life may not touch her. Wylie is herself the bricklayer; fashioned by her spirit and her will are the bricks..brighter than blood, the mortar..whiter than bone; freed from the imperfections of the flesh, the fabric builded by her spirit will surpass in brilliance and purity the grosser material world. The cell to which Wylie wishes to withdraw is the life of the spirit; here, remote from the world, she may escape the hurts from dead and living alike. The pain of her experience is revealed in the sharp-edges and fire-bitten fabric of her retreat.

With delight, she views the peace, the quiet, the cool, of her escaped self; but her dream is broken. To live in the spirit means death, for here no breath of life may enter. So at the last, Wylie renounces her escape. Life, with all its pain, is better than death and to flee from all contact with reality becomes impossible, for that is what provides

the material upon which the spirit of man may survive. This poem is, of course, another of Wylie's 'escapist' poems, and it does contain a strong expression of her longing for peace and refuge from the world; Wylie's intelligence refutes the value of such retreat, for, however difficult life may prove, the art which is valid must be evolved from contact and understanding acceptance of its pain.

In this early poem, taken from her second volume, Black Armour, is an unusually intimate revelation of the personal unhappiness Wylie suffered.

Drowned Woman

He shall be my jailer
Who sets me free
From shackles frailer
Than the wind-spun sea.

He shall be my teacher
Who cries "Be brave,"
To a weeping creature
In a glass-walled wave.

But he shall be my brother
Whose mocking despair
Dives headlong to smother
In the weeds of my hair.

The shackles are those bindings of her prized and valiantly defended spiritual and intellectual independence; the one who destroys this essential freedom of hers shall then be, indeed, her jailer. The second stanza relates to those who can somewhat understand the significance of her predicament and can therefore cry bravery to her. The glass-walled wave, like the frail shackles of the preceding stanza, present in a vivid

image, Wylie's vulnerability to the intolerant scorn with which she was regarded. Beneath the bright and hard exterior which Wylie created was always the weeping creature. We detected this underlying emotional element in the tenselyspun Jennifer and the tragic Rosalba; we have seen its presence in even the most outwardly brittle creations of her poetic imagination. The last stanza is her welcome, as brother, to the one who has an intimate knowledge through his own experiencing of a life similar to her own. His mocking despair is akin to her own hard surface which conceals the weeping creature; only the one who has undergone essentially the same experience and has, like Wylie, fashioned the brittle surface of a mocking despair to cover his suffering, can be kindred to her.

This is a rather unusual poem; Wylie does not often reveal her unhappiness. Her scorn, her defiance, her pride in her integrity--these gain frequent expression. Here, however, the lines, brief as they are, are suffused and pregnant with a heavy and inconsolable grief to which Wylie gives an indirect voice only in most instances. In this poem, too, we note that she does not forego her delight in cryptic statements such as that the one who sets her free shall be her jailer; or the glass-walled wave of her personal griefs. To my mind, such elements of delay serve to enhance the realization of the meaning; it is one of the most prevalent devices in poetic techniques, and one that Wylie practised with

evident delight and the utmost skill.

A clearer and more forceful expression of Wylie's persistent examination of herself is found in the curiously carved and cryptic Self-Portrait.

Self-Portrait

A lens of crystal whose transparence calms
Queer stars to clarity, and disentangles
Fox-fires to form austere refracted angles:
A texture polished on the horny palms
Of vast equivocal creatures, beast or human:
A flint, a substance finer-grained than snow,
Graved with the Graces in intaglio
To set sarcastic sigil on the woman.

This for the mind, and for the little rest
A hollow scooped to blackness in the breat,
The simulacrum of a cloud, a feather:
Instead of stone, instead of sculptured strength,
This soul, this vanity, blown hither and thither
By trivial breath, over the whole world's length.

Her mind she conceives of as a lens whose clear sight can convert to clarity the twisted and perverted patterns of the confused experiences of life--symbolized by queer stars--which confront its crystal gaze; a lens which can refract the fox-fires, the heatless flame and false fires which play about decaying matter,--here a symbol of the distrust and suspicion with which Wylie regarded the social and material elements in life. More than clear, her intellect is polished, refined upon the very harsh and stern surfaces of reality--symbolized by the horny palms..of creatures, beast or human, a symbolism which resembles that which we saw in Minotaur; a mind whose flinty hardness is cloaked by the Graces in

intaglio, that is, by the deceptive appearence of femininity which sets a sarcastic sigil upon her as woman. The emphasis is upon the clean, cool, hard intellect, devoid of feminine weakness, which she considers the moving force of her poetic imagination.

For the little rest, she writes, there is nothing but a hollow scooped to blackness where her heart should have been. The descriptive phrase, The simulacrum of a cloud, or feather, reveals again her conception of the emotions as fleeting and impermanent, and therefore to be obdurately put down. Instead of the stone, the sculptured strength which she designates as qualities of her mind, her heart and her soul, this vanity, are fragile and perishable. They are so soft, so light, as to be blown by the trivial breath, over the whole world's length. And in this symbol of the restlessness and deficiency that are revealed by the subtle workings of her subconscious creative imagination, we are led to perceive that Wylie is fully cognizant of the need of the warmth of human experience; aware that her denial of the affective elements of her being will eventually sap her strength and vitality as an artist. Suppressed in her life, the emotional forces of her nature play beneath the surface of her art, so that, as in this poem, one is always conscious of passion and warmth giving significance to her expression as poet.

But Wylie is not always to suppress her emotions. Her

poetry written in the latter years of her life, becomes open and candid in her revelation of the power, the glory and the griefs, of human entanglements. Such a poem as Unwilling Admission reveals clearly and fearlessly the sustaining faith and beauty of human love.

Unwilling Admission

Here is the deep admission, whose profound
And difficult verity is out of reach
For loose adventure and impatient speech;
How, lying on your heart, I have not found
Treason nor failure in its mortal sound:
It is not necessary to beseech
A bodily vow to bind us each to each
Whose veins are rooted in heroic ground.
In such uncounted piercing of your side
Some river in he ven over-brimmed and broke,
And your least courage wore a lion's pride:
No several hammer of your pulses spoke,
Save to affirm, "The brave have never died,"
Though you and I must die at every stroke.

Here, within the shelter of another's heart, Wylie reaches toward the recognition of love as a spiritual thing which partakes of the flesh, but does not die with the passing beauty of the body. There is no treason, no failure in even the least pulse of the heart's mortal sound. The difficulty of her perception is symbolized by the title; for Wylie had a life-time of distrust and fear of emotional experiences to overcome before she could perceive of the emotions as a lasting and natural element of experience. This is a love beyond the power of speech to convey, a love which goes beyond rituals for we need no bodily vows, she says, our veins are rooted in heroic ground. Heroic ground here symbolizes the firm and wide-spread basis upon which their mutual love is founded;

and in conjunction with the concluding sestet, heroic round further symbolizes the depth and pain of life experienced alike by poet and her lover. Against the hurts and mortality of the flesh, however, the enduring spiritual essence of their love furnishes them courage and security; in its greatness, love can deny death itself. That is the expression of the rightful place which should be given to the emotions in order to achieve a fully-rounded personality. But we should not fail to note that it is the understanding of the intellect, and the intuition of the spirit which give to love its permanence.

A more passionate expression of the greatness of love is to be found throughout the entire sonnet cycle, One Person. From that cycle we have chosen Sonnet No. 3, because in it Wylie reveals, symbolically, the path of her newly found wisdom and understanding.

"Children and dogs are subject to my power,"
You said, and smiled, and I beside you smiled,
Perceiving my unwisdom of a child,
My courage of a wolf new-taught to cower:
Upon the grass, beneath the falling flower,
I saw my spirit silent and beguiled
Standing at gaze; a brute no longer wild;
An infant wearied by the difficult hour.

And am I not your child who has come home?
And am I not your hound for faithfulness?
Put forth your hand, put forth your hand to bless
A creature stricken timorous and dumb,
Who now regards you with a lover's eyes
And knows that you are merciful and wise.

The sonnet has very strong symbolic overtones which reinforce

Wylie's vivid exaltation of a love experience--the one complete love in her life as Carl Van Doren has revealed. She humbles the self which she has defended courageously against slander and scorn; her wisdom she perceives, has really been the unwisdom of a child; she forsakes the courage of a wolf and becomes the creature, timorous and dumb. The line, and am I not your child who has come home, echoes the opening line of Sonnet No. I, "Now shall the long homesickness have an end" and awakens in our mind the memory of the homecoming of the Prodigal Son, who had, like Wylie, failed to find anything of value elsewhere in life. The line, and am I not your hound for faithfulness, strikes again a strong emotive response which arises in any reference to that faithful hound of Ulysses. This is a symbolism which Wylie uses elsewhere with much the same effectiveness. The concluding lines find Wylie rejoicing in the beauty and mercy of an equal and mutual love. The change in Wylie's attitude is truly remarkable, when we recall the earlier poems and the novels in which appeared so frequently the fear and distrust of the emotions.

The tragedy is, of course, that Wylie's full realization of the possible beauty of love came so late in her life. She had revealed much earlier, the falsity of an art which was not based upon the meaningful realization of the affective and emotional elements in her experience--this we saw in True Vine and in Minotaur--but these remained but partial glimpses of the significance of the affective life. We can rejoice,

however, that when a mature and richly vital love came to her, Wylie had ready the skill and technique to translate her experiences in words which reveal its greatness.

In her introductory sonnet to the One Person cycle, Wylie discloses her sensitivity to words, and her recognition of the true significance that words play in our life.

> Although these words are false, none shall prevail
> To prove them in translation less than true
> Or overthrow their dignity, or undo
> The faith implicit in a fabulous tale;
> The ashes of this error shall exhale
> Essential verity, and two by two
> Lovers devout and loyal shall renew
> The legend, and refuse to let it fail.
>
> Even the betrayer and the fond deceived,
> Having put off the body of this death
> Shall testify with one remaining breath,
> From sepulchres demand to be believed:
> These words are true, although at intervals
> The unfaithful clay contrive to make them false.

These words are false, she writes, in the realization that words are symbols only, and are substitutes for the reality of that which they express. Not the words, then, but the meaning in experience is what is true. My words, she writes, shall be proven true whenever Lovers devout and loyal experience in their own lives, the love which the cycle proclaims.

More than that, any love which is experienced is for that period a true and valid thing; the betrayer and the fond deceived who have not held to their love, shall testify that love is itself true, that their own weakness has played it false. From her opening line which asserts the falseness of

her words, Wylie arrives at the final realization that <u>These words</u> (<u>this error</u>) <u>are true</u> whenever their meaning is realized in experience.

The few remaining poems to be discussed are among Wylie's finest achievements. They reveal the flowering of her genius when to the technical skill which had always been at her command, Wylie could bring to bear the experience of a mature mind and personality. They cover the wide range of Wylie's interest, and give voice to her transcendental and rather mystical philosophy which she developed as she matured.

<u>O Virtuous Light</u>

A private madness has prevailed
Over the pure and valiant mind;
The instrument of reason failed
And the star-gazing eyes struck blind.

Sudden excess of light has wrought
Confusion in the secret place
Where the slow miracles of thought
Take shape through patience into grace.

Mysterious as steel and flint
The birth of this destructive spark
Whose inward growth has power to print
Strange suns upon the natural dark.

O break the walls of sense in half
And make the spirit fugitive!
This light begotten of itself
Is not a light by which to live!

The fire of farthing tallow dips
Dispels the menace of the skies
So it illuminate the lips
And enter the discerning eyes.

O virtuous light, if thou be man's
Or matter of the meteor stone

Prevail against this radiance
Which is engendered of its own!

No other poem of Wylie's reveals so strikingly her interest in the methods and processes of her artistic creation. We find in its quickly moving utterance a similarity to H. D.'s Pygmalion which is based upon the same theme.

O Virtuous Light is Wylie's symbol for the intuitive clarity of the creative imagination. Within the first stanza, however, we find this 'virtuous' light transformed into a private madness which has disrupted the rational processes of the mind. This sudden excess of light which is unrelated to the conscious mind has therefore temporarily broken down the mental processes. This second stanza reveals by the phrase slow miracles of thought, Wylie's awareness of that mysterious shaping power of the subconscious mind over the rational intellect. The intuition which feeds upon itself, and is begotten of itself, Is not a light by which to live; from its workings appear Strange suns upon the natural dark--that is, the distorted and hallucinatory visions of the poet whose fancies have excaped the modulating force of the rational mind. This is the danger of the mystic, as well as of the creative artist. To prevent the overthrow of the mind, the findings of the intuition must be drawn from natural experience. This latter idea is symbolized in the fire of farthing tallow dips; guided by such practical experience, the menace of the skies--the intuition--is dispelled, and the 'findings'

of the poet's intuition can be related to his social experience. Whatever the origin of the intuition, whether it derive from man's innate resources, or whether it be an outer force--symbolized by the meteor stone--the poet must force her intuition to work in harmony with her total experience and with her intellect.

The symbolism of the poem is created, original symbolism, suggested, perhaps, by the old Pygmalion myth. Wylie's skillful handling of the symbolic elements points out their meaning. In no other way than by the symbolic method could an experience so subtle and intense have been revealed. Its piercing brilliance of expression discloses the poet at work, as it likewise discloses the danger of the poet whose every instinct is to allow his creative imagination free rein and to forego the check of the intellect and everyday experience upon the visions which his intuition brings forth.

Wylie's third volume, Trivial Breath, contains the poem "As I Went Down by Havre de Grace..." in which the essential qualities that make life vital and rich are revealed through five main symbols derived from the poet's environment.

"As I Went Down by Havre de Grace..."

As I went down by Havre de Grace
I saw the laurel in the wood:
The hours (I said) are sands that pass,
And some are bad and some are good;
Some are black and some are bright,
Yet all were darker, I suppose,
In land where laurel is waxen white
And never white suffused with rose.

As I went up by Forty Fort
A saw the dogwood on the hills:
Life (I said) is hard and short
And riddled by a hundred ills:
Yet how much heavier I had gone,
How far from all my heart's desire,
In lands where dogwood never shone
Twisted by a tongue of fire.

As I went on by Steepletop
I saw wild strawberries underfoot:
Life (I said) is a water-drop
That falls upon a rotten root:
Yet were my grave the more profound
And planted thick with worser seeds,
Had I been nourished in a ground
Where strawberries never grow wild like weeds.

As I looked over by Isle au Haut
I saw the balsam in the grove:
Life (I said) is a flake of snow
That melts upon the bough above:
And I am murdered and undone,
But I was not bred in the middle land
Or in any valley under the sun
Where these dark trees disdain to stand.

As I went out by Prettymarsh
I saw the mayflower under the leaves:
Life (I said) is rough and harsh
And fretted by a hundred griefs:
Yet were it more than I could face,
Who have faced out a hundred dooms,
Had I been born in any place
Where this small flower never blooms.

The laurel which is <u>white suffused with rose</u>, is the symbol of a human love and sympathy which sustains the poet through <u>black hours</u> and <u>bright</u> alike. The land where the <u>laurel is waxen white</u>, or the land devoid of love, would make the hours of her life more difficult to endure.

The dogwood, <u>Twisted by a tongue of fire</u>, symbolizes the fierce flame of courage which makes the individual continue through a life riddled by a hundred ills. The beauty

of the dogwood gives promise that the individual can wring a like splendor out of a life that is hard and short.

The wild strawberries underfoot become the symbol of the nourishing goodness which may spring up even in a world that is nothing more than a rotten root. If, the poet says, from rotten roots and worser seeds, nature can yet produce strawberries which grow like weeds, so may the individual bring forth some good out of his own troubled life.

The balsam in its enduring greenness, becomes the symbol of the possibility that the individual may produce something more eternal which will outlast his life, ephemeral as a flake of snow.

The mayflower, first among flowers to bloom amidst the cold and barren wintry landscapes, symbolizes the hope and resurgence of the poet's spirit which persists in creating beauty in the face of a rough and harsh life, fretted by a hundred ills.

In each case, the symbolic reference is clear: each symbol, the rose-laurel, color of human love; the tough-fibred dogwood, twisted out of all reasonable shape and still gloriously beautiful; the strawberries, springing like weeds from the corrupt soil; the endurance of the balsam; and the persistent re-appearance of the mayflower--each contains within itself the sign and seal of those qualities which the individual needs to make his existence worthwhile. Because of the essential spirit, or quality, perceived by the poet

in these natural elements, each can become the crystallized focus of a quality of mind and spirit essential to man.

Malediction Upon Myself

Now if the dull and thankless heart declare
That this fair city is no longer fair
Because the month has peopled it with shadows
And swept the quality to hills and meadows:
Yea, if it cry in its ingratitude
That holy beauty is no longer good
But that it is degraded and cast down
Because it treads the pavement of the town:
If it accept the rank ignoble rule
That beauty is no longer beautiful
Because it is not straitlaced and aloof
But sets its sandal on a London roof
And takes polluted Thames to be its mirror:
If the vile heart is guilty of this error
I here pronounce upon its inmost nerve
The malediction which it must deserve.
Loosen its strings: let it no longer be
The instrument of mortal ecstasy:
Empty its veins of rapture, and replace
The fine elixir with a foul and base
Till the true heaven never more descends
In delicate pulses to my finger ends,
Or flutters like a feather at my heel.
Bind blindness on my forehead: set a seal
On each of my two eyes which have forsworn
The light, and darken them with disks of horn.
Stop up my nostrils in default of breath
With graveyard powder and compacted death,
And stuff my mouth with ruin for a gag,
And break my ankles of a running stag:
Let the long legs of which I am so proud
Be bended, and the lifted throat be bowed:
Lower the arrogant pennon which I bear
Blown backward in the fringes of my hair
And let its silk be trampled to a skein
Of serpents knotted in corruptive pain:
Let these my words unwind the virtuous mesh
Which knits the spirit to the naughty flesh:
Let me dismember me in sacred wrath
And scatter me in pieces for a path
On which the step of that I have denied
Descends in silver to his proper bride.

Wylie here expresses her conviction that beauty is in the perceiving; that it is not a definite quality reserved for some established and accepted objects of nature. It is a dull and thankless heart, which prevents the individual's perception of beauty. For beauty, writes Wylie, is here, in this polluted Thames, in the pavement of the town, on a London roof; it is not straitlaced and aloof; it has not fled to the far hills and meadows--symbol of the traditional conception of beauty. And if, she writes, my vile heart refuses to see the beauty in the every day life about me,,then must my heart be cursed; my vision distorted so that no longer will the true heaven (the individual realization of beauty and meaning) come to my finger ends to be expressed in song.

Wylie is once again warning herself of the danger in allowing her distrust and fear of the emotions to interfere with her insight into the real beauty of things. Should she let the results of her personal unhappiness blind her vision as poet, then all the most precious qualities and gifts she possesses are useless. She may as well lose her sight; her mind lose its reason; her speech be silenced; her pride and her graceful loveliness be destroyed. In brilliant images she reveals her pride in her ankles of a running star; the lifted throat; the arrogant pennons of her hair which are to be transformed into Medusian serpents knotted in corruptive pain, till she herself be as ugly as she deems all life to be.

And finally, she writes, Let these my words destroy my

body; let me be scattered in pieces for a path whereon beauty, that I have denied, may descend to his proper bride, that is, to the one whose insight may perceive the presence of beauty. This is a revelation of the pantheistic creed which Wylie expressed in Farewell, Sweet Dust, in which the dust of the human body makes the snowflakes softer feathered, the Clouds.. whiter plumed, and the leaves of the willow...bright as wine.

The central philosophic belief which is herein disclosed is that of the transcendentalist who finds in all the life about him some essence of spiritual beauty. The entire personality must work toward the perception of the spiritual meaning that is everywhere to be glimpsed. The failure of Wylie's vile heart is what prevents the fulfillment of this first duty of the transcendentalist; mind, spirit, and emotion, working together in harmony are needed to complete the full personality. A later expression of this belief that the earth is good, and that the evil in it arises from man's incapacity to unite all his powers within a harmonic whole, is found in the poem Dark Mirror, where Wylie writes, in part:

> The earth is untroubled
> And purely designed;
> Its beauty is doubled
> By a noble mind.
> .....
> But alas for the mirror
> Of a wicked brain
> Where the shape of error
> Hangs staring and plain!
>
> In the mind of the wicked
> The earth is not good;
> The trees are naked,
> And the seas are blood.....

For the last poem to be treated, I have chosen The Pebble, a curious revelation of the tolerant and wise philosophy which Wylie achieved in her later years.

The Pebble

If any have a stone to shy
Let him be David and not I;
The lovely shepherd, brave and vain,
Who has a maggot in the brain,
Which, since the brain is bold and pliant,
Takes the proportions of a giant.
Alas, my legendary fate!
Who sometimes rage, but never hate.
Long, long before the pebble flieth
I see a virtue in Goliath;
Yea, in the Philistine his face,
A touching majesty and grace;
Then like the lights of evening shine
The features of the Philistine
Until my spirit faints to see
The beauty of my enemy.
If any have a stone to fling
Let him be a shepherd-king,
Who is himself so beautiful
He may detest the gross and dull
With holy rage and heavenly pride
To make a pebble sanctified
And feather its course with wings of scorn;
But, from the day that I was born
Until like corn I bow to the sickle,
I am in hatred false and fickle.
I am most cruel to anyone
Who hates me with devotion;
I will not freeze, I will not burn;
I make his heart a poor return
For all the passion that he spends
In swearing we shall never be friends;
For all the pains his passion spent
In hatred I am impotent;
The sad perversity of my mind
Sees in him my kin and kind.
Alas, my shameful heritage,
False in hate and fickle in rage!
Alas, to lack the power to loathe!
I like them each; I love them both;
Philistine and shepherd-king
They strike the pebble from my sling;

My heart grows cold, my spirit grows faint;
Behold, a hero and a saint
Where appeared, a moment since,
A giant and a heathen prince;
And I am bound and given over
To be no better than a lover.
Alas! who strove as a holy rebel!
They have broke my sling and stole my pebble:
If any have a stone to throw
It is not I, ever or now.

Beneath the skillful versification and the lightly satiric tone of the poem, there is much of hard-won wisdom. Wylie uses the Biblical legend of David and Goliath to symbolize her conviction that only he "who is without sin (may) cast the first stone." David is here the symbol for those people who hate the gross and dull; who hate whatever is foreign to their conception of good. This hatred, a maggot in the brain, feeds upon itself until it Takes the proportions of a giant, and our noble Davids are led to shy their pebbles of scorn and abuse at the offenders. Not so Wylie; she is 'condemned' to see in those elements alien to her--the Philistine--my kin and kind. Her insight perceives what there is of beauty and value, and so her rage is dissipated, her hatred fickle. In addition to this insight, moreover, Wylie can know her own failings--how then should she condemn another? The hatred, the pebble, is left to him Who is himself so beautiful He may detest the gross and dull.

This poem becomes the more striking as we realize the many scandalous attacks directed at Wylie; but even against those enemy Goliaths, against whom she strove as a holy rebel,

she is no better than a lover. Her simple conclusion, If any have a stone to throw It is not I, ever or now, is her answer to her critics. Not is it less than true; qualities, dullness weaknesses, these Wylie attacked; but never did she make any attempt at retaliation against those critics in personal expressions of abuse.

This brief survey of Elinor Wylie's poetry does not do full justice to her talents as poet. Many of her longer poems, such as the Hymn to Earth, and This Corruptible, which are among her finest creations are not here presented, since there is not so much of the symbolic element and method in them. Similarly we have omitted the mask-allegories found in several ballads, notably The Mountaineer's Ballad, Hughies at the Inn, and Peregrine. We feel, however, that the selection is representative; it covers the complete range of her career, contains an abundance of examples of the various techniques and poetic forms Wylie adapted for her own use, and includes the most important types of symbolism.

We have nowhere attempted to evaluate the poems in the order or merit of their poetic value, nor their relative greatness in the complete field of poetry. We might well state that the sure technical brilliance of Wylie makes it difficult often to distinguish between the lesser and greater poems in her collected work, for her poetry shows a remarkably

even quality in its technical mastery. It is possible to see a growth in maturity of its intellectual conceptions, and a steady deepening of its emotional intensity--especially is this true of the poems in her last volume, Angels and Earthly Creatures.

Whatever decision time may make upon her work, it will be true, as Cabell asserted of The Venetian Glass Nephew and Jennifer Lorn, that should future generations lose sight of Wylie, they will have a valid claim upon our pity. For hers is the work of a highly intelligent, and deeply sensitive artist, whose technical ability could fashion proper and fitting forms for the intuitions of her poetic imagination. It is one of the signs of genius, that the artist unerringly finds the correct forms for his talent--that Wylie did without a flaw in her poetry.

It is doubtless true that the subtle and exquisite texture of her best work will make its appeal to a rather select group. This does not lessen its value as great art--for it may be safely stated that it is the exceptional accredited masterpiece (and not always the best of the sanctified works) which makes an appeal to more than a small group in any single generation. For the reader who is perceptive, Wylie's work will hold wit and wisdom, passion and tenderness, in forms ranging from a mannered elegance, from a chiselled and severe simplicity, to the vibrant power of her last volume of poetry.

Chapter VI

AN EVALUATION OF WYLIE'S ART

We are, now that we have analyzed the greater part of Elinor Wylie's prose and poetry, in a position to estimate her value as an artist, and to attempt to evaluate the merits of her symbolic method. We had, perhaps, best state our conception of the significance and function of art in life in as simple and definite terms as we may.

We call that art great which affords the reader a clarification of a way of life; for the value of art, beyond that of amusement or play, beyond that of sensuous pleasure in pleasing forms, sights, or sounds, lies in a deeper perception of ordered and meaningful experience. Vital art is never beauty in a vacuum; it may and can be beautiful in relation to the life which the reader himself experiences. When the artist so orders his experience, his total view and knowledge of life so that from it the reader may glean the meaning of that presented experience and relate the derived meaning to his own experience, then we may claim the work to be genuine art.

The artist, then, does not primarily strive to please--an aim which belongs to the hedonists--but neither does he strive to teach--an aim which leads to propaganda or didactic art. The artist, rather, discloses the beauty, the ugliness, the tragedy, the humour of life; discloses it so that from the characters, from the incidents, from the background, the

reader is led to say, This is significant; this or that is limited and false; this is the way of life I can choose or dismiss. Further, the revelation of meaning, this disclosure of that which is good or bad, tragic or humourous, arises (for the artist as well as for the reader) from the material or experience of life from which the work of art is derived. True, the artist cannot approach nor treat his environment--the material of his art--without some achieved attitudes or perspectives toward the life he knows; but he may not force the material or the view of life he is presenting into directions ordered by his preconceived attitudes--that is the way of social propaganda. What the artist does is to view life, to find in it qualities of good and bad, to discern what is significant, what is meaningful, and then to express his perceptions so that the reader may grasp their meaning and relate the findings to his own experience.

To reveal his perceptions of the meaningful relationships in life, the artist has the choice of a wide range of materials and forms from which to fashion his art. He may choose to treat contemporary life, he may choose ancient settings, or he may choose to create wholly visionary worlds; for the setting is not of itself important--what is important is the use the artist makes of his material. Similarly the poet, the novelist, the artist in any field, may work within conventional forms, or may create new forms and new means of expression; for, again, the use of the formal elements, and

not the forms themselves, is what is significant. Whatever his chosen material, whatever his chosen forms, the artist breathes vitality and significance into his art whenever the meaningful relationships therein disclosed are drawn from his knowledge and understanding of his own environment, his own total experience, and his own awareness of the genuine and lasting elements in life and their relationships, which remain valid and true for all ages.

With reference to the above brief and dogmatic pronouncements, we may ascertain Wylie's value as artist. Using the above statements as a framework for reference, we find that Wylie does indeed fulfill the requirements of artistic interpretation of a way of life. True, in her novels she has persisted in retracing the life of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the discoveries, the relationships, found in the novels are derived from Wylie's reactions to and understanding of her own period.

We may briefly trace the themes and the purposes of her four novels. We have said that they are an interrelated and continuous exploration of the individual in relation to his world. In Jennifer Lorn, Wylie exposed the failure of a marriage based upon an unsound and essentially false assumption of male superiority. Her concern was for the emergence of woman--the individual--to share an equal status and importance with man. The result upon Jennifer of the dominance and arrogance of her husband was her reduction to a state of

excessive vacuity; her intelligence, her individuality, her integrity were destroyed. The problem--whether an individual is to be permitted to develop his faculties, his gifts, and his talents in a society of equals--is as much alive today as during Wylie's lifetime, and as during the eighteenth century.

Her second novel dealt the the same fundamental problem, but in a different setting and from a varying point of view. In The Venetian Glass Nephew, Wylie was concerned with the need of the individual for a fully-rounded personality and experience. Rosalba had the potentialities for just such a vital and complete life--but the environment, the superficialities of social decorum, symbolized by Virginio, prevented her from achieving the highest development of her natural gifts. Again, the framework in which Wylie's theme and purpose were worked out, was that of marriage; and again the victim was the woman. But the problem, as we saw through the interpretation of her symbols, had a wider application which includes the experience of the individual in any and all ages.

The Orphan Angel then took up the problem of the relation of the artist to his world. As a symbolic and allegorical biography of Shelley, and as an autobiography of the mind and spirit of Wylie, this primary purpose--to determine the place of the artist, to determine what relationship the artist may assume toward his world, was the motivating force of the book.

And, lastly, in Mr. Hodge and Mr. Hazard, we find Wylie again concerned with the problem of the artist and his world.

The theme is broadened, however, for through the clarification of those essential qualities, talents, and attitudes, which go to make up the complete personality, Wylie posits her philosophic perspective which is applicable to all men.

Having, through the medium of these novels, discovered that the individual must hold on to his integrity of thought, of action, of emotion; having realized that the individual's total personality must be developed despite the hampering effects of a dull and unperceptive social environment; having revealed that escape from reality, that the refusal to face the responsibilities and to embrace the pains and joys alike of reality, were stultifying and disruptive to the personal development of the individual; and finally, having clarified her realization of all the faculties and needs of the human being toward the greater effectiveness of his life, Wylie realized that her work as novelist was done. So it was that Wylie, in the last days before her sudden death, told Mary Colum that she would not again write a novel;[1] she had indeed completed the full cycle of her exploration of the individual and his world.

This brief analysis of Wylie's philosophic perspective reveals the result of a life of close attention to the problems of living. However tragic, disordered, and unsatisfactory her personal life may appear in the eyes of the world, her achieved philosophic perspective presents a whole-

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1. <u>In Memory of Elinor Wylie</u>: New Republic, Feb. 6, 1929

ness and unity of purpose in her art that sorts ill with the usual critical attitude toward Wylie. The epithets of "aesthete" and "romantic escapist" which pursue her name can only be understood as the result of careless and incomplete reading, or as the result of the mistaking of the surface for the substance of her art. To illustrate from two widely different sources: one does not confuse Jane Austen's purpose in Northanger Abbey in exposing the lush and unwholesome sentimentality of a social temper which could tolerate the perfervid romance of the entire Radcliffian School with the assumption falsely drawn from the surface appearance of that novel that Austen was herself an escapist; nor does one, because of the obvious unreality of Swift's created world in Gulliver's Travels, refuse to him the recognition of his satiric purpose in attacking the sores and weaknesses of his contemporary world. Neither should the reader refuse to Wylie the choice of setting, of environment, of materials, which has been the prerogative of many lesser or greater artists throughout all ages. Especially should this be granted Wylie in view of her clear statement of purpose in creating symbolic and allegorical novels.[1]

That her characters are not flesh and blood creatures is readily granted. These too, are symbols only of faculties, attitudes, and possibilities of the human personality. And, again, this suits with her purpose in enriching her four

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1. Elinor Wylie: Collected Prose, Page 879

novels. Remote in point of time as her settings may be, and unreal as her characters are, what animates these characters and pervades the action and interaction of character and environment, is Sylvie's recognition of the basic drives and needs of the human being as she perceived them in her own experience. This experiential basis for her writing we have discerned through the study of the secondary, personal symbolism which underlies the structure of her novels.

In her poetry, we have seen an artistic and philosophic perspective which harmonizes with that derived from her novels. Here too, the personal integrity of the individual, the responsibilities of the individual toward his world, the need for tolerance, understanding for other--and possibly alien--ways of life, the expression of the union of body, mind, and spirit into one fused whole, and the awareness of the meaningful relationships between all the wide and seemingly disparate elements in life, find clear and forceful expression. Through the study of the symbolic poems drawn from the complete range of her work, we have been able to see the gradual development of Sylvie's mature perspective; for the symbols of her poetry are, like those of her novels, drawn from her total experience, and frequently reveal the shaping forces of her subconscious realizations upon her conscious attitudes toward life. Only thus, when the symbol is evolved as the result of the artist's reaching through the surface verbalism to the experiential core of meaning of

which the symbol is the sign, does the symbol become a valid and functional means of expression.

Much of the power and vigor of her poetry is derived from her use of symbolism. For the symbol, as we have seen, introduces an element of delay into poetry which heightens the recognition of the meaning; the symbol, demanding from the reader, the direct participation of his complete range of perception, further enhances the meaning and value of what the poet is saying. Finally, by its use, the symbol awakens the reader to an awareness of the relationships which obtain throughout all the elements of experience; it is, as it were, an emblem of the fact that life and its meaning consists in the relationship of the individual to all else--seen and unseen--within his world. The symbol and its referent constitute in and of itself, an ordered and constellated area of meaningful relationships--that which is, in our view, the end and aim of all art.

Wylie is no "escapist," she is not the poet of futile despair, not the poet who would counsel the negation and falsity of life; she is, rather, an authentic modern artist, using the materials of her art toward a clarification of a positive, realistic, and integrated way of life. The formal elements, the brilliant and sometimes epigrammatic style, the condensed symbolic forms of her art, the remote times and environment she employs, make possible the creation of a subtle, intense and yet impersonal expression which elevates

her art to the rank of vital and enduring art. Writing as she did out of much unhappiness, out of frequent illness and pain, Wylie achieved a strong and sure revelation of the possible beauty and significance of life. That the importance and significance of her work will be understood and cherished by the few and not the many, we readily grant; that is, as we understand it, the fate of most of the world's finest creations, and does not imply any limitation or lowering of the value of the art as such. For those--and there will always be some--who delight in subtlety, who enjoy the rich texture of perfected form, and the firm mastery of emotional content, the sharply-glinting, ironic amusement at the false social conventions and prejudices which Wylie attacked with all the concentrated power of her gleaming scalpel, for those readers, Wylie will offer a richness of experience, of intellective meaning and of emotional intensity not often equalled, and but seldom surpassed.

ABSTRACT

The intention of this thesis has been the re-interpretation of the value and significance of the art of Elinor Wylie in relation to her time. To effect this evaluation of her art, we have studied her life, insofar as the scant biographical material now extant would allow, and attempted with the further aid of the autobiographical material in her poetry, to build up a picture of Wylie as woman and as artist.

The valid approach to the interpretation of her art we discovered to be dependent upon the reader's understanding of the symbolic method in art. For that reason we have analyzed symbolism; its historic importance as a method in art, its philosophical basis, the psychological functioning of symbolism, its purpose, and the justification for its use, with particular reference to Wylie's use of the symbol. We concluded that symbolism in art was an extension of the symbolic functioning of the mind upon which all our acquiring of knowledge depends; we found that symbolism in art was a native and direct means of expression from the total realized experience of the artist to that of the perceptor; we found that the artistic processes of the symbolic artist closely resembled the processes of dream-symbolism, but that the purpose of the artist, in thus organizing his experience into a single image, elevated the artist's symbolism from the casual relaxation of the dream-symbolism. And lastly, we discovered the supreme importance of the symbolic method to Elinor Wylie, in that it

enabled her to fuse those elements--the emotional and intellectual--in her art which, in her private life, remained for so long a time discrete and mutually antagonistic.

We turned then to the analysis of the symbolism of her allegorical narratives and the symbolism in her poetry. From the interpretation of these elements in her writing, we found that her works are an interrelated and continuous exploration of the individual in relation to his world, animated by Wylie's thorough understanding of the basic drives and needs of the human being as she perceived them in her own experience. Wylie was always concerned with the need of the individual to maintain his integrity of thought, action, and spirit; with the recognition of the responsibility of the individual toward his world; with the need for tolerant understanding for other, alien ways of life; and lastly, with the expression of the union of body, mind, and spirit into one fused whole, and the revelation of the meaningful relationships between all the wide and seemingly disparate elements in life. This latter concern, the awareness of the relationships which obtain throughout all the elements of experience, Wylie effected by her use of the symbol, which, in itself, constitutes an ordered and constellated area of meaningful relationships. It is this ordering of experience into a significant and meaningful clarification of a way of life which we find to be the end and aim of all art.

The result of our analysis of the art of Elinor Wylie has led us to conclude that she is an authentic modern artist, who has used the materials and forms of her art toward a clarification of a positive, realistic, and integrated way of life. This, we realize, is contrary to the established critical attitude toward Wylie, but we find that the charges of romantic escapism which are hurled at her art are the result of a confusion of the surface, formal elements of her work for the substance and inner meaning of her art, or, at best, of an incomplete reading of her work. The justification for the approach we have used in our study of her work is derived from the clear and definite statement which she expressed in her essay Symbols in Literature.[1]

1. Elinor Wylie: Collected Prose, Pages 875-879

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Contains her four novels with prefaces by Carl Van Vechten, Carl Van Doren, Stephen Vincent Benét, and Isabel Peterson. There is an additional section, Fugitive Prose of short stories and essays, with a preface by William Rose Benét.